

ANGELS' SHOES

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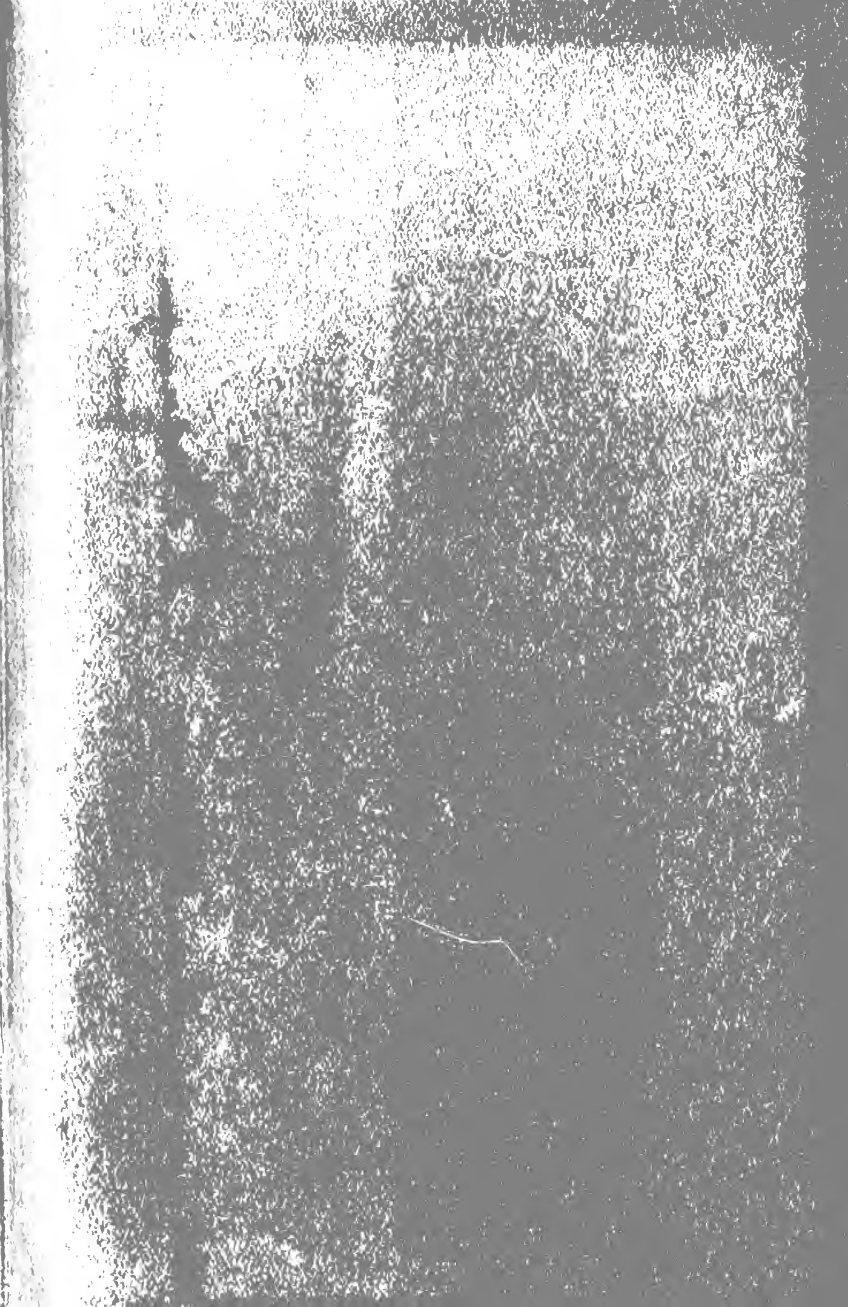
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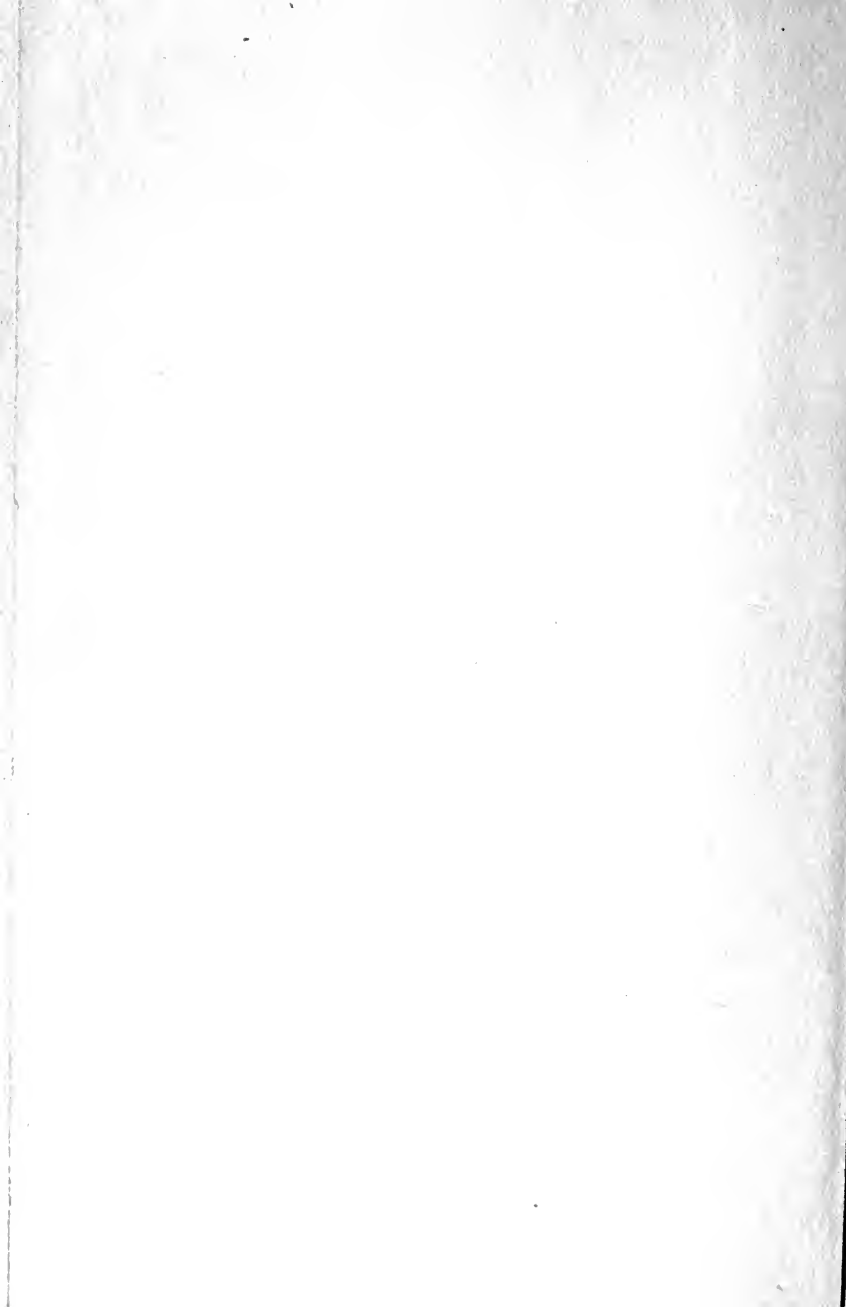
M. L. C.
PICKTHALL



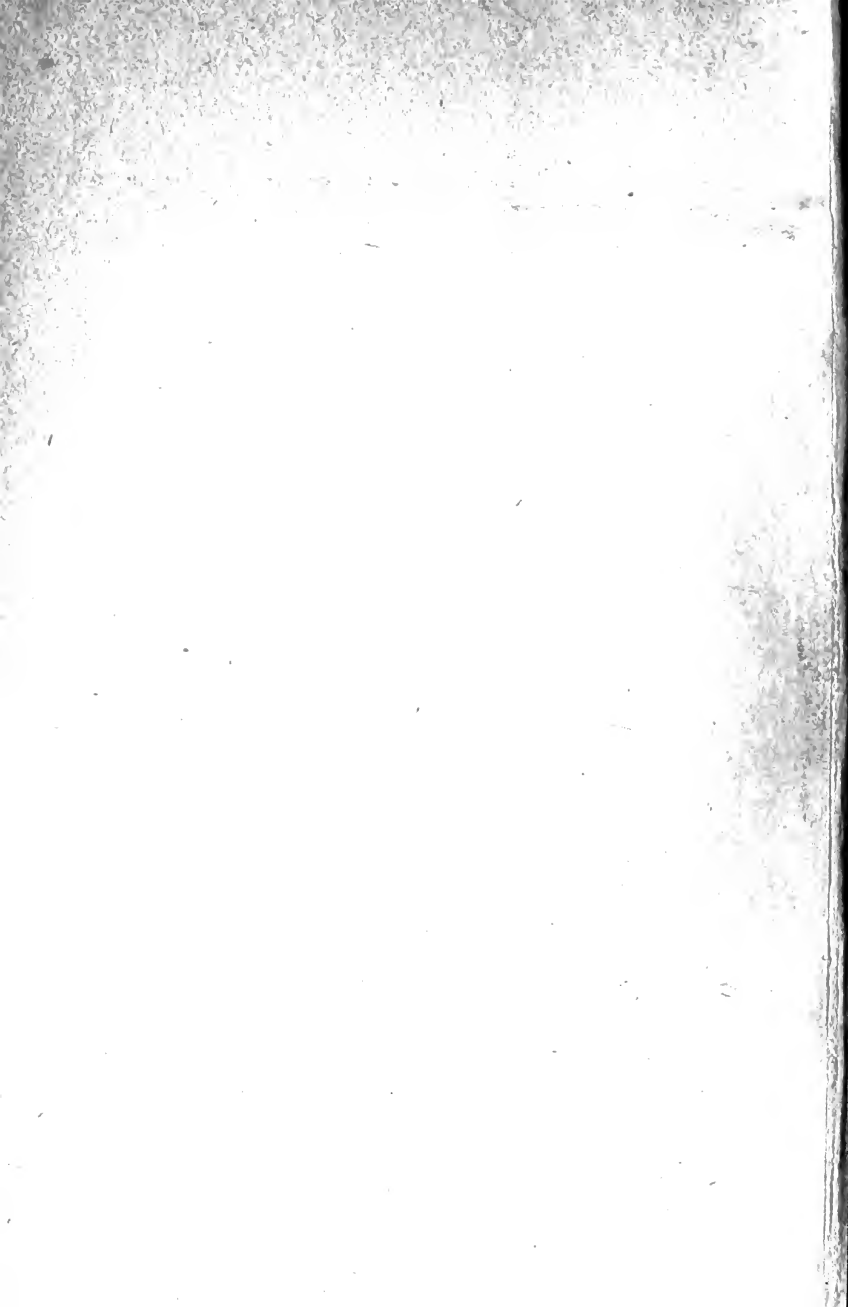
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ANGELS' SHOES AND OTHER STORIES



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AND OTHER STORIES

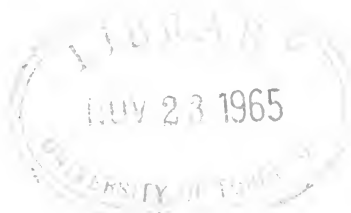
BY

M. L. C. PICKTHALL.

Author of "The Bridge," etc.

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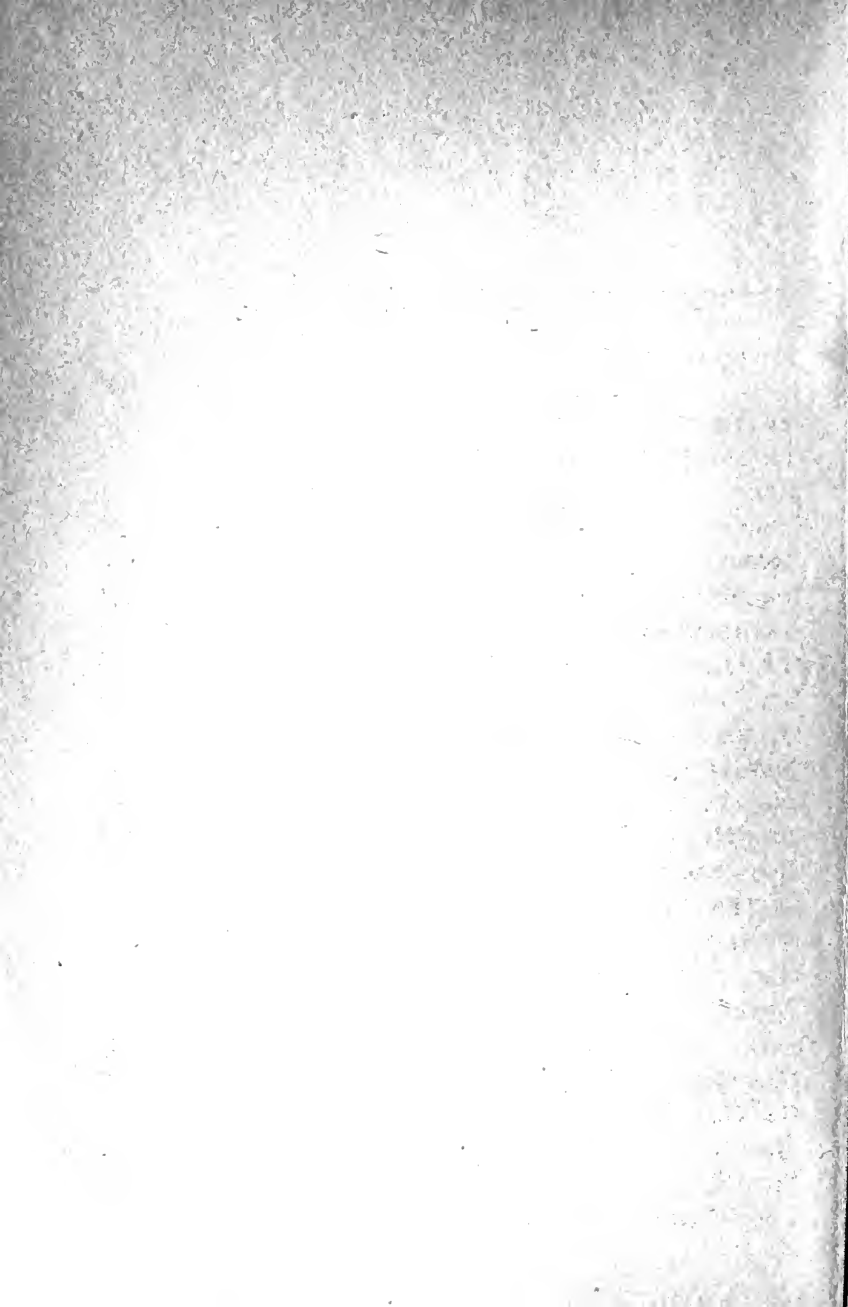
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ANGELS' SHOES



ANGELS' SHOES

THE Horado, huge, torpid vein of the back-country, after taking tribute of a thousand miles of jungle was suddenly released into the ocean, whose clear and fertile depths it stained with the earth's rot and detritus. Where these two encountered there was war, of meeting and retreating waters ; which only ceased when the slow pressure of the turning tide exactly balanced the slow outpouring of the vast stream. Then, for a little while, there was peace. In the midst of such a peace lay the barquentine, *Dorotea Dixon*, waiting for high-water on the bar.

She, the soiled little trader, was briefly an illusion, a dream, built of some substance of pearl-petal and rose-gold too lovely for a name. Grier said the wet deck looked so fragile, so iridescent, that he tapped it with his heel as he stood, for the assurance that he stood on something more solid than a very bubble of the foam. The crew were silent ; for the most part gazing overside at the streaks of mud-brown coiling in the sapphire ; for the scornful sea never entirely mingled with the current of the river. It was all glitteringly, insubstantially, clear and vivid and still you'd have thought, said Grier, that a great glass globe had been clapped down over everything. Islets of grass, logs, nameless jungle-drift the dark river brought down and left about them in that strange belt of no-man's-water between the flood and the flood. In the very fulness of dawn it brought the dugout.

The dugout, along with the other drift, drew silently and very slowly towards them ; touched at last on the port quarter with a distinct double knock. After a curious pause and hesitation, a man rose on the rail with a rope ; there was a glint of faces along the rail as the others gazed at him. Grier warned : " Careful, Mac-Awe," but less

out of consideration for the dugout, he says, than for the spell of stillness they must break. His voice, or the voices of the triumphing tide, broke it; and it was amidst a commonplace clatter, on a commonplace deck, that they lifted and laid Brennan and the native girl.

The girl was all right; Brennan, the huge bull of a man, was in a bad way. He'd little on, Grier said, but a pair of burst canvas shoes much too small for him; his shirt he'd rigged as a sort of shelter for the girl. They carried them below and put them in a cabin, having first ascertained that the girl wore a brass ring on the third finger of her left hand; for the Old Man, as Grier said, was "uncommon correct." Then, leaving them to the Old Man and his box of medicines, they went to the work of coaxing the *Dorotea* up stream. First, Grier took off the man's shoes—cut them off in strips—for his feet were bruised to the bone.

Two hours later, the *Dorotea* being safely warped to a tree above the jetty, Grier went down to look at the waifs again. He met the Old Man coming out of the cabin, a blue bottle in one hand and Brennan's shirt in the other; a gaudy garment of yellow stripes, indescribably fouled and torn. The Old Man, staring grimly over the huge steel spectacles he always assumed when he opened the medicine chest, held out the shirt to Grier; Grier gazed blankly. At last the Old Man condescended to explain, to point with the bottle.

"You don't tell me, Mr. Grier," he burst out, "that the fellow's any *right* to it."

Grier saw that there was a celluloid collar attached to the shirt with a brass safety pin: the orthodox straight band of white a parson wears. The Old Man went on, quivering with indignation; he was, as Grier said, "uncommon correct." Grier looked into the cabin. The girl had curled up at the end of Brennan's bunk, sound asleep nursing his wounded feet in her arms. Something in the sight hit Grier hard; he glanced from her to Brennan's brutal, blue-black, upturned jaw, whistled thoughtfully, and went out.

Impossible even to imagine that jowl over the parson's collar!

But it was Brennan's jaw—or the quality it stood for—drove him that last thirty miles between Santa Luce and the Horado.

At Santa Luce—nothing but a river-crossing—he stopped and buried his last porter. He would have delayed for nothing living. Even Buck Brennan was obliged to delay awhile for that pitiful dead. He gave Rosario a few inches of earth; rested a little; took what he could of the double load, and went on. Thinking, as he told Grier, "Well, Rosario, *hombre*, your resurrection won't take no three days". . . A hard brute, Buck Brennan, with a heart like a baked brick; enclosing God-knew-what of fires of powers. . . . He had no choice but to die where he stood or a little farther on. He jutted out that great coarse jaw of his and chose to die farther on—as far as possible. And—as far as possible—he came on the house.

Imagine a great forest, bare of all life but one brown ant crawling in it; imagine in the very heart of that forest a tiny ant-heap, just a spoonful of honey-colored granules in the roots of a grass-tuft. Can you imagine the ant finding the ant-hill? Yet, in the vast jungles of the Horado, the creeping atomy that was Brennan, came on the house.

There was, in one window of the house, one little bit of glass, which caught the levelling light through some aisles of the unplumbed forest, and shone like a star. It drew Brennan, though he was then past thought. It was an automaton of mere muscle that he made towards it, mounted steps that sagged like hammocks, found a door, and set his shoulders to it. The door gave, groaning. Something tangled his feet and tripped him—a rope, or a vine of the myriad that veiled the very substance of the house. He fell as it seemed to him, very slowly; and the door sank before him like a mist. He heard a bell ring outside, far overhead—it rolled like the salute of a gun, a challenge, a war-cry flung hollow of night, all ringing and booming with bells.

Out of this deep sleep he woke in a dawn full of screaming clouds of little parakeets. They flashed past the doorway and vanished, but their green and gold lingered on the rim of every motionless leaf: the forest seemed to drip

glory. But the splendid moment passed. A hot wind blew, and, somewhere overhead, set a cracked bell jangling. Brennan dragged himself to his feet and went to explore.

Food he must have; he had it there, in the load he'd let fall as he fell. But before that, before anything, he had to explore the house. Hunger was urgent. But there was something around him more urgent still. What?

He found no answer for a long time in the ghost of that little native-built house fading away into grass and green and mould—a visible sort of transubstantiation, going on, to go on, for how long? Who had built it? Who had deserted it? Why? He moved cat-footed on floors wrenched apart by writhing growths, where squares of solid mildew proclaimed that matting had been. He cleared the windows with his knife—it was like cutting snakes—and watched intently as the light fell on blotched and voiceless walls. There were glasses and warped frames here and there on the walls: from all but one the ants had eaten the pictures: this one had been backed with tin, and so the Madonna of the Chair still looked out, through the veiling of the damp, with her exquisite clear benevolence. Brennan tried another room.

Here were two little iron beds side by side, bare of anything but rust; a table, and a tin box. Brennan opened it. Books and papers rewarded him—several little gray-bound Gospels, an Imitation in Latin, a "Reading Without Tears," and Miss Braddon's "Vixen." He was immensely bewildered and annoyed; he guessed a clue lay here, but was not sure of it. He tumbled the books about, and a shower of little cards fluttered out and lay gaudily on the floor. There was a picture and a text on every card. Brennan stooped and read "Suffer little children," "He that speaketh truth sendeth forth righteousness," "Charity suffereth long and is kind." . . . He swore in pure astonishment and went on. On to the room at the back that ran the house's width; of which the outer wall had fallen, leaving a drunken fringing of roof, a drift of greenery, dissolution and growth going on like a battlefield over—over what? Six benches in a row, a little raised platform,

some coloured rags hanging from a roller that must have been a map, and a blackboard.

The place had been a school.

A school, a mission-school, in the jungles of the Horado ! A picture-palace or a morgue would have appeared equally unnatural, equally out of drawing. Over the rotting roof, in a little cupola of split cane, hung the bell. As Brennan stood knee-deep in rubbish, staring at the blackboard, the bell moved in some unnoticeable air and clanged hoarsely. The school-bell ! . . . He turned to the blind doorway. And there were the scholars.

Native children. Three or four. One naked earth-coloured boy had a broken slate under his arm. One tallish girl wore the remains of a print gown, which she had washed clean. They stood gazing at Brennan in a wild, humble way, as if they also had lost their clue. Perhaps they could help him to his, though. But with his movement they fled, vanished, melted like shadows into the leaves. He had an impression of their eyes, bewildered, faithful, like the eyes of once-beloved ghosts. In the little cupola the bell was also faithful, calling to school.

Brennan ate and drank that day from his own small supplies. Then he stretched himself on one of those little iron beds and thought.

Food he must have—to go on with. Food, and perhaps he'd make the Horado ; follow it down : find a boat. . . . But his mind persistently revolted from this balanced considering of days and ways, to a mere wonder, a curiosity. This school. Who had built it, kept it ? Where had they come from, and why ? Where had they gone, and why ? *That*, not his journey, was what mattered—here. He went through everything with an intent method, but he found no more than a name in the Imitation—"Bonnie West," and a date. Who on earth was Bonnie West ? Sitting on the edge of the bed, he frowned from the book in his hand to the mould-haloed Madonna on the wall till his weight sent the legs through the floor and he slid off. He swore, but defiantly. . . . Grier said, "He always made me understand that the house still *belonged*. He never had any sense of ownership, or any right there. He was per-

petually guilty, as if his hosts might return and find him there, unwelcome. He was apologetic when he renewed some of his badly worn clothes from a few he found put away under the books in the tin box—a coat and a pair of shoes I believe ; he used to wake in the night, he told me, shaping excuses for making so free. Buck Brennan ! D.D.'s clothes they were—Devil Dodgers—parson's clothes."

Perhaps it was with some idea of a vague repayment that Brennan began to clean out the schoolroom. . . . Lianas had climbed to the roof, burst it, lapped about the little belfry. Everything he touched, he told Grier, the bell rang. And he'd a notion that the scholars still haunted the place ; he felt himself continually watched, followed—weighed, perhaps, and found wanting. Once he looked up quickly from his tidying, and there they were again in the door. But again they fled and the forest swallowed them as some say a mother-snake will swallow its young. It troubled him. He thought that if he had on the parson's coat they might have stayed, and then he would have found out everything. . . . He always wore it after that. And as the strange empty, preoccupied house worked on him, he added one of the straight white collars he also found in the box. But they would not return for all the wool this innocent wolf stuck on his rough pelt.

He had no heart those first days for venturing into the jungle again, even to find out where the children hid, and where he might get fresh supplies, and perhaps porters for his further journey ; his necessities all lapsed curiously into the background. But the morning came when he took his gun and went out, moved from his uncommon lethargy by the need of the next day's dinner. He told himself he was after pig. But he followed the trodden path he found leading from—and to—the mission school. It must lead to the village. He had followed a thousand such corkscrew trails. But this one ended in nothing. Just that. It was as if a hand had come down and wiped everything out, as you wipe something you don't want read off a slate. Bare, burnt earth was there, and a leprosy of ashes. Rain had fallen in the night ; he saw, in the ashes, prints of children's feet. And went back without his pig.

After that, he was continually on the watch. He shot and cured meat, as much as he could carry for any journey. He still lingered, confident that somewhere in the jungle was the clue, the answer to the riddle of emptiness of ashes, and of the fluttering ghosts of the children, that he had set himself to solve. . . . Who can say what held him there? One evening, an hour from the house, he parted branches and looked on a camp.

Of himself, nothing was clearly visible in the gloom of the leaves but the white linen collar about a throat that many would have preferred in a hempen one. Of the man who sat in the daylight and the firelight, nothing was hidden as he looked up, saying, thoughtfully, "Ah! So they have sent another already. . . ."

"When Buck went back to the house," said Grier, "Manuel Franca went along; and when he stood at the door, and looked into the emptiness, he smiled."

"And the roof didn't fall on him?"

"No-o-o, nothing so inadequate; it was only palm-thatch. What did happen was that he went into the inner room where the rusty beds were as if he knew the way, picked up that little Imitation, fluttered the leaves, and, when he came to the name written inside—'Bonnie West,' he smiled again."

"What has that to do with—?"

"With Buck Brennan? O, a great deal. . . . You ought to have talked to Buck. You see, he'd done nothing but try and think things out, and wonder who Bonnie West was and what had happened to her, until he'd made a sort of picture of it—and her. She must have seemed quite real to him. It was in the jungle, you know, anyway. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, when Franca smiled, Buck took a dislike to him. So you see, it was much worse than if the roof had fallen. . . . Thank God. And I never saw Bonnie's name in a book."

Now, she begins to come into it.

An excessively strange companionship must have ensued between those two in the empty mission-house; neither asked any questions of the other, in a situation that called for many; a betrayal in itself, if both had not so studiously

avoided the veriest shadow of distrust. Certain things Buck never cleared up—for instance, if Franca took him for a bona-fide padre because of the collar! It sounds impossible; but in there," as Grier puts it, "the priests are just anything." Perhaps Franca was too deep in his own affairs to notice Buck much; for it took no more than a day or two for Buck to realize that he also was waiting, watching, searching for something with an intensity that defied pretence. He believed Franca had come back—ah! come back?—to find something.

Brennan also began to look for it, though he was hampered by not knowing what it was! And by the necessity of keeping up appearances. He went on tidying the schoolroom; he told Franca that his porters had deserted on the way up with most of his goods, which was moderately true; he was expecting to get new men, only they seemed to have all run away from the vicinity.

"The scholars also, they have run away?" suggested the leisurely Franca politely.

"Yes, but—"

"But I will bring them back to you."

Brennan said that what followed was like a nasty sort of adjectived miracle. Franca idled to the door—he was always idling about, peering in cracks, feeling walls, gazing into holes with a hunger of insatiable eyes—and called. The leaves of the forest shook, here and there, as if Fear moved them. He called again. And Fear crawled on its belly from the leaves to his feet, the boy with the slate, the girl who wore the remnants of the print wrapper. They did not even tremble; they waited, like ducks for the food to scatter.

"These are all that are left, I think."

Franca stooped forward and took something from the girl's neck. It was a dirty little bag on a string. He looked about, smiling; then hung it on the corner of the black-board. "They will not run far now," he nodded to Buck. The two crept away.

Buck Brennan was a bit taken in the wind, as he would have said. And that night he woke to a low moaning like the wind, a voice of grief so faint, so uncomprehending,

it was not human. He took a light and went to the school-room. The girl was there, a bare thing of the night, her eyes luminous as its stars. She was squatting at the foot of the blackboard, making this sound of uncomplaining loss. Brennan knew what she wanted. She wanted her little lucky-bag, and was afraid to touch it. He took it down, looked into it; his clue was not there: unless a little bone collar stud with two or three hairs wrapped around the shank was a clue? The hairs gleamed in the light, reddish—fair. . . . He closed the little smelly thing, and gave it to the girl. Felt, the next instant, her hands, her tears, on his great bare feet! So she was a human being, not unattractive, and wildly grateful. He laid a hand like a lion's paw on her: but she melted from him, and he did not follow. She was not his; like the house, she belonged. . . . To what, to whom? To a ghost, a shadow, bringing bright hair and a halo of lilac print, that looked at Buck with the eyes of a fate he might never learn. He went back to the bedroom, looked long at Franca, asleep and smiling. And began to feel that here, perhaps, was all the clue he needed.

He spent a long time next day sitting over the little books, like a jury over so many little corpses; smoking heavily, and very uncomfortable in the mildewy coat, the stiff collar, and the parson's shoes so much too tight for him. They were all part of position into which he had been drifted, to which he so strangely yielded himself; but he preferred to leave a certain veil of doubt and obscurity over it. Into that puddle of circumstances he would never look too closely, lest he should see reflected there a bad Buck Brennan he did not know and couldn't have lived with—an avenger, a judge, grimly appointed by some vast mockery or vaster justice.

And there, as he sat, suddenly he had his clue in his hand.

It was the half-sheet of an unfinished letter, rolled into a little spill and thrust into the rounded back of the book. He unrolled it carefully, and the hand-writing, clear and rather childish, sprang out at him in the fading grayish ink.

". . . . For I do think, Chubsie, Lewis is the very best man in the world. You'll laugh; but he takes such beautiful

care of me, and the work's so interesting, and the babies are such dirty little ducks, all eyes and tummies. I don't really feel fit to be a missionary's wife, but I'm trying to be, and I know quite a lot of Spanish. And on Thursday, he said I was—what do you think?—an inspiration. Don't laugh, you bad girl. Oh, Chubs, I wish I could *hear* you! And that brings me to the one thing—I wouldn't tell him for the world, but I can tell you because I know you never *breathe a word* of what anyone tells you. This country frightens me. It's not a bit like the winter I was in Ceylon. Just sometimes, you know; though I tell myself it's only for two years, and I'm with Lewis, and I was *willing*. But it's interesting too. Guess what he found that time he went up the Horado to the fifth tributary.—Fancy, it hasn't even a name!—where the boys said no white man had been before. He found whole forests of rubber trees. I said, 'Was it valuable?' And he said, 'Yes, *immensely*,' but he'd never make use of it or tell anyone it was there, because he said rubber seemed to be one of the accursed products of the earth, and death and suffering always followed where it was. *Of course* I agreed. Isn't he splendid? Then Mr. Franca came in. I must tell you about him. He's quite splendid in a catty sort of way; but truly, I'm a little bit afraid of him too. He's like the country. . . ."

And that was all. But Brennan had his clue. Clue? It was a revelation, a whole dark landscape shown in one flash of leven-fire. He crushed the little spill in his fingers, and across the chasm of her fate cried to Bonnie West,—
"Yes, I see, I see. But what did he *do*. . .?"

"You have it. . . ."

Franca, just breathing the words, stood in the doorway; he leaned, not towards the paper in Buck's hand, but away from it, as a man leans against the pull of a rope.

"You have it. You know it. . . ."

"What do I know, I wonder?" said Buck, thoughtfully, his eyes never leaving Franca's.

"Where he went. . . . What he found. . . ."

"Yes." Buck was more thoughtful than ever. With a single movement he took his pipe from his mouth and

tilted the red-hot ash on the paper in his palm. The thin "foreign note" curled instantly in a fluff of little flame, ended in a square of fragile gray edged with dying scarlet. Buck sat watching it quietly. Franca had cried out once, no time for more. Now he stood grunting and sweating like an animal, one hand pulling and fumbling at his belt.

"No good." Buck shook his head. "No good. You wouldn't be such a fool. . . . *I am—now—the only living soul that knows.*"

The only living soul Franca went out.

That night the native girl, with her lucky-bag and her rags of faithfully guarded print, crouching in darkness, saw a great light. A lantern was held over her head, a hand hauled her mightily from her hiding place. She was dazed as by the coming of a god: she suffered a resurrection: she shook, and was still. But the god's voice was kind.

"I like you," said Buck Brennan, that uncommon thoughtfulness still upon him. "You're my kind; and you'd be right pretty for a brown one if you was washed. I like you for sticking to her; the place where she was. . . I can't leave you here, now them poor little fools is gone. . . Them poor little *damn* fools. You better come with me. I'll be straight with you take care of you hand you over to the first missionary we meet, and may the Lord have mercy on my soul." Buck was a bit confused; but neither this closing solemnity, nor the parson's col'ar, nor the parson's canvas shoes seemed quite enough Buck swallowed hard, suddenly dry of throat.

"Bonnie West," he said, distinctly. "*Bonnie West.* . . . There, will that do you?"

Yes, it was the talisman of trust. The dark little wild thing rose and went with him, holding on to the tail of the parson's coat.

"And after all," said Grier, "how little Buck knew, how little he was able to tell! And yet enough—plenty. If the girl told him more, he kept it to himself; and I don't know if he or anyone else but Franca knows the close of the story of the poor little good little Wests and their mission. The secure and comfortable organization that sent them out doesn't know: I've asked it. They just went out:

were swallowed up in the great dark land that was so unlike her winter in Ceylon, and frightened her sometimes. And Franca. . . . Why didn't Buck shoot Franca and have it done with? I don't pretend to know that either. It scarcely needs putting into words, the certainty that Franca killed, wiped out, abolished the Wests and their little mission because he didn't want 'em to get that rubber: and then couldn't find it himself. . . . Any good man would have shot the beast and thanked God for the chance. But Buck wasn't good—only in spots. He had an erratic sense of humour, and he'd been in that house some time—with Bonnie West. The method he chose involved more risks to himself. But think of the devilish far-reaching completeness of it!

"The story of his escape with that girl from the jungles of the Horado would make a saga. But he can't tell it. The rains came on, and it took them a month to find the river; Franca fighting on behind them—in case they were making for the blessed rubber! They stole a dugout somewhere and launched it for the sea; followed a long fever-dream of bars, and beasts, swimming trees, sunken islands, reversing currents, falls, impossible portages; and all the time the knowledge that Franca was dogging them behind or waiting in an agony for them in front. Afraid to let them out of his sight. . . . It probably brought Buck through; as I say, he had a peculiar sense of humour; and then he had the plucky girl. . . . I don't know when the brass ring made its appearance, or what ingenious ceremony it celebrated. Once, I believe, she got fever and gave out; and Buck would tie her in the fork of a tree, drag the dugout overland, launch it, go back for her, and carry her to it. No wonder his feet were bad. Think of it! And all the weary way, Franca followed.

"I tell you, that villain began to pay then, as he'd never paid in his life, and it was only the beginning. He hated Buck, as, I suppose, few ever come to be hated; and he was mad with anxiety over the personal safety of the only living being who knew where to find that rubber. What a vengeance, eh? I tell you, I saw him crawling on the jetty, before I had heard anything about him, when Buck was very

bad aboard the *Dorotea*, and he was the hot ghost of a man. Of a man? Of a devil. He looked like a devil dying of hunger, and that's just what he was.

"He said to me, panting as he spoke, 'Is it true that you have the Señor Brennan aboard there?' 'Yes,' I says, 'And is it true that the fever is heavy on him, and is he talking much in it?' 'No,' I says, 'he's no fever, and does nothing but snore, and the fo'c'sle's complaining. . . . And who may you be, so anxious to hear what he says in his sleep?' But he crawled away with a sort of groan. Yes, Buck's way was the best; Franca had begun to break then, torn as he must have been between his hate and his greed; but I doubt if my—well, my sense of humour!—would have been strong enough to let me take it! . . . All for the knowledge of the direction that unlucky little saint of a missionary had taken when he found the rubber trees, and that knowledge in Buck's head, and nowhere else in the world.

"Yes, it was masterly. How he must have thought, 'Some day, he must betray it. Some day, he must go back to his rubber, some day, he must show—me—where it is. . . .' But Buck hasn't!

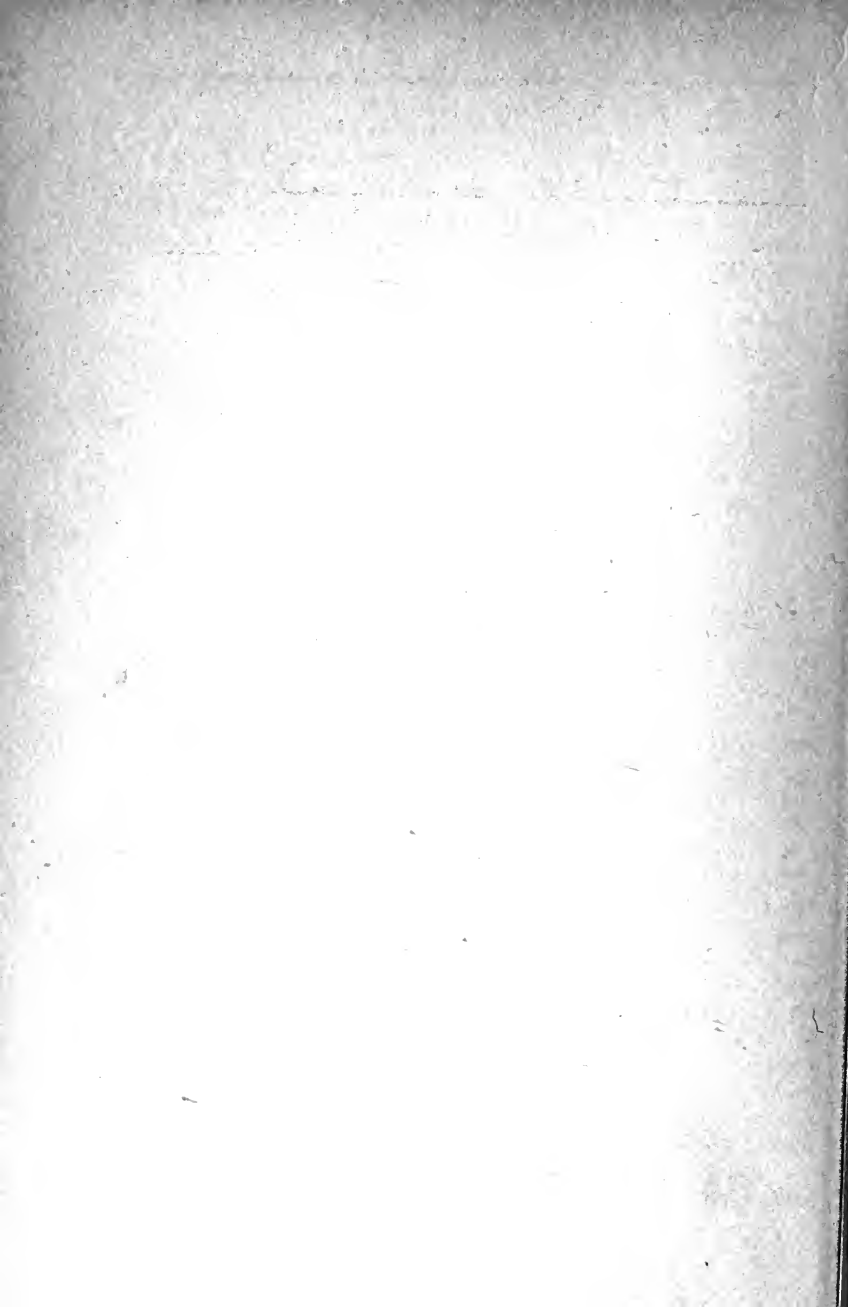
"Queer, isn't it? I told you he'd a fat sense of humour. He enjoys himself immensely over it. He starts suddenly on wild expeditions with a great air of secrecy over them; Franca drops everything, beats up a party too, and trails him. When he's been led far enough, Buck turns round and comes back. It's ruining Franca. He's obsessed. He can do nothing but follow, follow, follow. . . . But the worry, and the travelling, and the hate on an empty stomach! He's taken to drinking now, Buck tells me, and he can't last long. What worries me is that he'll realize the game's up, and stick that itching knife into Buck at last.

"And the cause of it all, the rubber? I never speak of it to him. Perhaps when Franca's beyond any chance of profiting by it. . . . Perhaps then. . . . But I don't know, I'm not sure of Buck. He's talked to me a good deal, of the house, and Bonnie West, and her letter in his hand. He remembered every word of that letter, wrote them down for me, but gave me no confidence, for he changed the

directions. . . . It was not the fifth tributary ; only he knows what it was, and I've an idea only he will ever know. I think not through Buck Brennan will the hell of the rubber trade come to the country where Bonnie West lived and died. It wouldn't be the first sacrifice he'd made to that erratic sense of—humour.

“ He hasn't gone on any expedition this year. I think he's inclined to domesticity. He's been incredibly staunch to that little brown girl of Bonnie West's. I often think of them in the cabin, and cutting the parson's shoes off. They were far too small, those shoes for Buck Brennan.”

THE SLEEPING FAUN



THE SLEEPING FAUN

I

"WILLIAM writes that he is home from Italy, Helena ; that he is married to Lucia Vasotti, and that he begs us to send the child to Great House on a visit, so that it may be less lonely for Lucia—a stranger in a strange land, as he justly observes."

"And likely to remain so. Most unsuitable."

"Hush, Helena, we must not be harsh. We will send the child, but only for a short time."

Launce was that child, and that was the first word he had of Lucia Vasotti—her name, linked with "unsuitable." It must have been blown to him on some wind of chance, because he was up in the dove-house at the time with three Ribston pippins and *The Bride of Lammermoor*. The flutter of homely wings was in his ears, the sharp fresh apple-scent on his lips, Lucia was maddening on the sunlit page before him, and "Lucia" was blown past him on the keen spring air. Until he died, that name was to him as the call of remembered music far away. Then old Pansy came and hauled him down the ladder in a hurry to be measured for two new shirts.

Launce was the only child at that time in the family, and he was used to being handed round a large circle of grown-ups for the comfort of this or that member thereof, like a foot-warmer. He remembered his Uncle William as a tall, dark man, incredibly supplied with shillings and generous of the same. Great House he did not know, but he was a child of steadfast mind. He went off very calmly, well shawled and muffled, with a small black box and two white mice in a cage. It was a day's journey, of which he remembered little, save that the willow catkins were out and the southward-fronting gorse in bloom along the windy

coast. He reached Great House just as a wild sunset was flaring above the sea.

The house stood high for that level land, surrounded with a great sweep of terraces and plantations. It was built upon a fair and gracious plan, but the bitter sea and the north-east had taken their toll of it. The gardens were starved with sand, and the trees shorn off at wind-mark as with a sword. The buildings too were grey and wind-bitten, but now they swam in a strange red light. On the terrace above the beach a lady paced up and down, wrapped in a red cloak. And she moved like a moving flame in a still mist of fire.

"That is Unsuitable Lucia," said Launce. He turned along the terrace path where the sea-shells gitted with the gravel, the mouse-cage tied up in a blue handkerchief in one hand, and his cap in the other, rehearsing the little speech that Aunt Helena had taught him last Sunday with his collect. As a result he was not very clear whether his "honoured aunt and the warm welcome that ever awaited dear William's bride, however unexpected," held a prominent position in the Church Service, or whether he must remind this Lucia that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, but need to be kept both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls. However, he had no time for either, for the lady saw him, and stood, holding out her hands.

"Are you Launce?"

The child went up to her; he could see that her eyes and hair would have been very dark without the red-gold light that shone in them as fire shines through smoke. Then she moved quickly and kissed him, and the vision was blotted in the folds of her red cloak, through which he saw the world as in a flame. "Are you Launce? I am your new Aunt Lucia, but you must call me Lucy, for I am English now. I shall love you, you little brown, long-nosed boy. Will you love me?"

But how could the boy answer, drowned in his first vision of what a face might be.

She laughed a little, and sent a long, ringing call up to the house—"William, O William, here is our nephew come."

And then there was Uncle William, jumping out of the window of the gun-room and running down the terraces, and saying, By Gad, now, was that big boy little Launce, and how glad he was to see him, and Mrs. Annerley had tea ready in her room. But first he'd better give the mice to Simmons.

"I'd rather have them in my room, if Aunt Lucia does not mind. They are not very mousy."

"Afraid you'll be lonely in the night, eh?"

"No, Uncle Will; I'm afraid they will be lonely, they are sensitive mice."

And Lucia laughed. "Why should I mind, William, the pretty little living things in the house? There are so few of them." She glanced at the house with a faint shiver. The sea had suddenly taken the sun, and they moved like grey ghosts in a ghostly garden. Only on Lucia's face the light seemed to linger.

Uncle Will patted her hand as he had patted Launce. "Well, come along, laddie. You must be hungry, and Mrs. Annerley has slain the fatted calf. But go into the gun-room first. There's someone there you see more often than you do me."

"Who?"

"Your godfather."

Launce went to the gun-room with a happy face, and greeted his godfather with a nod, as one boy greets another. Mr. Geoffrey Launcelot was sitting on the table, apparently busy in admiring his own legs, very effective in new gaiters. He went straight to the point, as was his custom. "How's the brown rabbit?"

"Well, sir, thank you, and has seven little ones. I've given two to Bill's boy."

"That's right. Always give away what you don't want yourself. How's Foxy?"

"He's well too."

"And what do you think of your new aunt?"

Launce stood gazing at him above the mouse-cage. He opened his lips to speak, but the vision came on him again, and something beat in his heart and choked his throat like the flutter of prisoned wings. He stood stammering,

and felt with amazement his own cheeks grown wet with tears.

Mr. Launcelot handed him a handkerchief with an unmoved face. "Boy," said he, "I'm sometimes damnably afraid you're going to be a poet."

Launce steadied his nerves with Mrs. Annerley's veal pie. He slept in a little gaunt room looking out over the gardens. Downstairs there was music—Lucia's laughter, the piano, Uncle Will's hunting songs, and then young Geoffrey's tenor, high and wild as a bugle, ringing through the hollow corridors.

"I dare not ask a kiss,
I dare not beg a smile.
Lest having that or this
I might grow proud the while."

He fell asleep to the unaccustomed music, and he awoke to music—the bleak music of the wind and the sea.

He was late for breakfast, but Geoffrey was even later, strolling in imperturbably after the eggs, his curly hair still sleek from the sea.

"To-day," Uncle Will announced, "we're going to unpack wedding presents."

Unpack—a happy word. Launce awoke from a dream of Lucia's morning face behind the urn.

"Well, boy?"

"I have a new knife, sir. If I might cut the strings—?"

"Come into the hall. They are all there. And you shall cut all the strings."

The grey old hall was littered with packages and cases and straw; the wind shook the curtains, and drove along the floor a fine dust that was not dust of the earth, but sand of the sea. Launce was sent for Lucia's red cloak, a happy errand. And when he came back they had knocked a wooden case apart and stood above the swathed contents, waiting with a smile for the offices of the new knife.

There were many strings to be cut, but at last the packing and the sackcloth fell away. And Launce cried out suddenly and was silent. He felt again that flutter as of wings in his heart.

Yesterday he had looked his first on beauty living and

mortal. Now he looked his first on beauty dead and all but immortal.

A boy was there, sleeping in the honey-coloured marble that seemed to have drunk its fill of some long-remembered sun. So soft, so warm, so golden-grey it shone in the dusk of the hall, that Launce cried out again to touch it and find it cold. The boy lay with his head thrown back on his arm. Vine-leaves, broken now, were falling from his hand, clinging to his curls, and vine-leaves lay where his little goat-hooves had crushed them ere he slept. His face was neither good nor evil, only beautiful. And his happy sleep seemed so light a thing that a laugh, a song, the touch of a bird's wing or the shadow of a falling leaf must serve to break it, and awaken him to some unknown life apart from evil and from good, the rising and setting of whose days and nights was beauty.

"Well, my lady," cried Uncle Will in his big voice, "you know where that comes from, hey?"

With one of her swallow-swift movements, Lucia stooped above it. "The villa," she murmured, "the gardens, the laughing sea, and the sun—" She laid her cheek suddenly to the smooth, cold cheek of the sleeping faun. "I kiss you, O beautiful, for the sea and the sun—for Italy—"

"You are an odd kitten, Lucia," said Uncle Will, "and you have some dust on your cheek. Let me wipe it off for you. And don't forget to tell Mrs. Annerley about those sweetbreads."

To Launce—and another—it seemed the little faun should have smiled and wakened beneath that kiss of hers.

Launce wrote home that evening :

"My dear Aunt Helena, I am very Well. The mice are very Well. Uncle William is very Well, and will write when he can gain Leisure. Aunt Lucia is very well. I am glad to be here to prevent her from being Lonely. My dear Godfather is here too, to prevent her from being Lonely. He sends his Compliments, and did not tell me how to spell it. He has new Gaiters. He has a new Horse, which he calls Monseigneur. I do my Latin daily, and am, my dear Aunt, your loving and dewtiful Nephew, Launce. My dear Aunt. She is bewtiful."

II

LAUNCE was very happy at Great House, in a way that was a little bewildered and dream-like. The grooms and gardeners liked him, and were kindly. There were horses in the stables, great store of pups and kittens, and a boy with red hair who kept two ferrets and had been known to win sevenpence on the races. He read Latin with Uncle Will, who had forgotten his syntax, but vastly revered Horace. He had long walks and talks with Lucia on the windy terraces, and might dream of her by the hour in a newly-dug cave behind the summer-house. Mr. Launcelot, fashionably languid by day, was wont to wake up in the evening and go thundering about the country on his great bay horse. Often he took Launce on the saddle in front of him, and the boy would spend an hour of delirious delight as they swooped in great curves above the hard beaches, returning with clouded stars ahead and the foam of the in-running tide at the horse's heels. Sometimes they would all go off together, a merry party, Uncle Will on his steady grey weight-carrier, Launce on a fat pony, Lucia on a brave old mare with a touch of the Arab. Then at the last mile Uncle Will would say, "Give her a gallop, Geoff," and the two light-weights would flash away, the old mare running as smooth as a swallow, and Geoffrey a neck behind, bearing hard on Monseigneur's bit—away and away, down the levels of silver sand to the far lights of Great House. Uncle Will always rode that last mile with Launce in silence. Once he said, "I wish I weren't forty-three, boy, and didn't ride fourteen stone." It occurred to Launce that his godfather, fighting the great bay, was a fine thing to see.

They set the sleeping faun on an old pedestal against the sea wall, among a struggling growth of rusty wallflowers and sea-lavender, under the windows of Launce's room and the gun-room. The boy would waken in the moonlight and watch that other boy asleep in the gusts of the night. Sometimes the waves would cover the flat beach almost to the bounds of the garden; and then in the early morning Launce would go and clear the little faun of dried weed and sand, and the bitter salt crusting of the sea. He begged a

hardy rose of the gardener, and planted it at the faun's head, but the wind uprooted it.

Lucia found him as he was taking it from the sand. "What are you doing, little boy?" She nearly always called him "little boy" with a smile that was a caress.

Launce found it hard to explain, and turned very red in the effort. "I thought he would like a flower."

"But there are little flowers here."

"Yes, I know. They are very sweet, but the lavender looks grey, and the wallflowers are like rust. I—I thought he would like something—different. These—these are not his flowers."

She was dressed for riding, and stood looking at the child gravely, tapping the stone with her whip. "What then?"

"A red rose, Madonna."

"Hush," said Lucia quickly, "hush. You must not call me that." She laid her fingers an instant on his lips.

Launce turned redder than ever. "I'm sorry, Aunt Lucy. I heard godfather call you that, and Uncle Will laughed. I thought it was polite." He hoped she would laugh too, and kiss him in a pleased way, as she did when he remembered to give her her English name of Lucy.

But she still looked at him strangely. "These little flowers are just as sweet," she said with earnestness: "they are brave and poor, but they content the heart. Oh, yes they content the heart."

"Not his," persisted Launce; "he wants roses, Aunt Lucy, red roses with the sun on 'em." He looked up at her shamefacedly, and saw to his relief that she was smiling at last, though her eyes were shadowed.

"How do you know?"

Launce shuffled in the sand. There was nothing she might not have of him when she used that voice. He would have told her of his fight with the red-haired boy, of the cave behind the summer-house, even of the humiliating fact that he still kept, secretly, at the bottom of his play-box, a shapeless wooden doll called Ephraim. Now she lightly asked of him a harder thing—his dreams. Well, she should have them.

"I think he is not really asleep, the little faun. Aunt

Lucy, I think in the night, the quiet dark night, he wakes up."

"He wakes up—?"

"Yes. He's not very clever. He does not know where he is. But he can do things."

"What things, little boy?"

"I don't quite know. But he knows something, and they know too. I think I've seen, Aunt Lucy—I'm almost sure I've seen. I think he calls things. He wakes and calls. It is like music, but there is no sound. It is like dancing, but he does not move. Only he is awake, somehow, inside the stone. And last night, when the moon came out between the clouds, I saw the rabbits dance on the path, and other things, too—"

"What things?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Launce desperately. "I fell asleep on the window-sill. Little queer things out of the larch-plantation, but all alive and dancing."

"Dancing—?"

"Yes," said Launce, fired by his own fancies—"like this." He flung two handfuls of sand in the air, and began to dance on the starved grass. He was small and slight, and he moved, in his wild fit, like an elf of the woods, a leaf in the wind. All the steps he ever knew he wove into a medley, beautiful because of the speed and grace of his little flinging body. Then, dancing fast and faster, he lost them, and there was nothing but young life leaping in the air, as the blood in the heart, the wave on the sea. "This is how the little faun dances," he cried, shrilly. And in a moment Lucia had swept up her trailing skirts, and was dancing too.

If the child danced like a leaf in the wind, she danced like a flame in the bracken, a swallow in the air. Launce dropped on his hands and knees to watch her, breathless, and she wove a chain of lovely movements around him as he knelt. Her feet moved like music, her green habit seemed to bear her up like a bubble with fire in the heart of it. Her wild face was flushed, exquisite under her shaken hair. But when Geoffrey Launcelot came down the path she stopped in a flash, and was once more the great lady of Great House.

"Will can't come," said Geoffrey, pulling on his gloves; he had apparently seen nothing of the dancing. "He bade me offer my escort, Signora."

"Shall we ride, sir?" said Lucia gravely

Mr. Launcelot bowed. "If you will so far honour me, Signora?"

Then, catching the subdued wonder of his eyes, Lucia laughed, and Geoffrey began to laugh, and Launce echoed them for very pleasure in the sound. "But do not call me that, Cousin Geoffrey," said Lucia. "Do not say 'Signora.'"

"What must I say?"

"Say 'Cousin Lucy.' That is English, and of the English custom. I wish to forget—the other—"

"Thank you, Cousin Lucy." Geoffrey did not lift his eyes from his gloves. "I told Simmons to bring the horses round to the foot of the steps. Shall we mount there?"

A flight of broad, shallow stone stairs led from the lower terrace to the beach. They were always scoured and swept by wind and wave, half buried in sand, with shells and bent-grass in the cracks. Simmons was holding the two horses on the beach-road beneath. Launce joined him, and was warned from Monseigneur's heels. The others followed. Geoffrey handed Lucia down the old steps as though all London town were watching, and had for his reward the touch of her foot in his hand as she sprang to the saddle.

"Shall we take the boy?" he asked, with a look at Launce, hopping hopefully in the sand.

Lucia glanced with a little shrug at Monseigneur. "If you think it is safe."

"I guarantee that, of the two, my neck is the only one like to be broken. And that, Cousin Lucy, is of consequence to nobody."

Lucia was bubbling over with mischief. "I do think you take very good care of your neck, Cousin Geoffrey," she said kindly. "I hear of you as a very reckless young man, but I see nothing of it. You do no very hard things, and you always change your boots when they are wet. And I have left my whip near the little faun—Dio mio!"

The others echoed her startled cry. For Geoffrey, with

a sudden little laugh, faced the bay horse at the broad steps and began forcing him up them, with hand and knee and spur—up, up, snorting and straining, to the terrace. He swung him round the little faun, caught up Lucia's whip, and came down the steps again in one leaping, clattering rush that seemed as if it must end in red ruin.

"My God, sir!" cried old Simmons shrilly, snatching at Launce.

The bay came down on his knees in a shower of sand and shingle, staggered up and on, and was carried clear across the beach-road into the surf. Here the rider had the mastery in an instant. And before they could catch breath he was at Lucia's side, splashed to the hair, on the wet and trembling horse.

"Here is your whip, Cousin Lucy," he said, gently.

"My God, sir!" quavered old Simmons again, running to the horse's knees.

Lucia did not take the whip. She sat looking at Geoffrey, trembling exceedingly. "How dare you!" she said at last, under her breath, "how dare you!"—and then, bending forward, she broke into wild tears.

The colour went from Geoffrey's face as if he had been struck, and Launce, with a swift sense that the world had begun to go astray, saw that he too was shaking. "Here's your whip, Cousin Lucy," he said again, and even his voice shook.

But she struck it from his hand, struck it down in the sand, spurred the mare, and went off full speed down the beach. Geoffrey followed her in an instant. They saw her motion him away fiercely, saw him rein Monseigneur back two lengths in his thunderous canter. Then the silver shimmer of sun on leagues of grey beach and sea took them, and old Simmons turned with a sigh. "Lord be gentle wi' 'em," he said, aloud. "Come you wi' me, Master Launce."

The bleak gardens lay grey and quiet in the pale light. Only the crushed and trampled wallflowers and the old steps scarred with hooves served to show that a storm had passed. Launce, touching the little faun as he lay in his stone sleep, started back to find the leaf-covered breast warm, as if a heart beat there. But it was only the warmth of the sun.

That night Lucia did not go early to the drawing-room, but sat with Launce in the little room over the gardens till he fell asleep. The moon seemed to be reeling down the skies under a great press of steam-white cloud, and now the room was dark, now silver-bright. Sometimes Launce had no more of Lucia than her firm, small hand in his ; sometimes he saw her face, pale and clear as the face of the little faun in the garden below. He was very sleepy, and there seemed to be music in the air ; drowsing, he wondered if the little faun were calling them so, out to some unknown magic of the night. Presently there was more music in the room beneath—the gayest, brightest little laughing tunes imaginable, and a cheerful thumping noise. Uncle Will was apparently sitting on the window-sill and applauding with his feet ; and the tunes went flying out of the window like little blue and golden birds.

“Sing, Geoff, sing,” cried Uncle Will in delight.

There was a silence, a changed chord on the instrument , and the high, wild voice rang out :—

“ I shall not go with pain,
Whether you hold me, whether you forget
My little loss and my immortal gain.
O flower unseen, O fountain sealed apart—
Give me one look, one look remembering yet,
Sweetheart.

“ I shall not go in grief,
Whether you call me, whether you deny
The crowning vintage and the golden sheaf.
O April hopes that blossom but to close—
Give me one look, one look and so good-bye,
Red rose.

“ I shall not go with sighs,
But as full-crowned the warrior leaves the fight,
Dawn on his shield and death upon his eyes.
O life so bitter-sweet and heaven so far—
Give me one look, one look and then good-night,
My star.”

Again the child was pierced with that wordless sense of the world astray, of loneliness, of loss. “Godfather Geoff is going away,” he said drowsily, “he told me so,” and felt for Lucia’s hand. The room seemed to open in the darkness, fronting a flood of silver. And he saw her face, shining with silent tears.

III

Great House by day was a mere pile of bleak grey stone, set in a wind-bitten garden. Selfish lovers, the sun and the wind took, but gave little. But at night the place seemed to come into its own. The straggling larch plantations took on mystery from the dark, the shivering birches took on grace, the sandy paths shone silver as if for the tread of unseen feet. By day everyone stayed away from the house as much as possible; only by night was it a home, with laughter and song and the light of welcoming windows. All that the day denied the night bestowed. And it was at night that Launce made his plans and discoveries.

It was one of these plans that led him, after being safely bestowed in bed by Mrs. Annerly, to rise and wrap himself in a coat and seek the garden by devious ways, with a small bottle in his pocket and the two white mice for company. The bottle contained the dregs of wine glasses, secured and preserved with some difficulty. He was going to try the effect of a ceremonial libation on the little faun.

His step from the door-sill to the gravel had the nature of a plunge from land to water, so different was the hush outside, to the ordered, companionable stillness of the house. His heart beat high. The night was one of heavy calm, the sea beneath the sandy terraces was almost silent. A few stars showed, and the hollow sky was full of the wandering cries of peewits wheeling inland above the salt marshes and the crumbling dunes. The little faun was very cold and very still in the dark. He laid the little silken, throbbing bodies of the mice in the curved stone fingers, and they cowered there without a movement.

"There's no dancing to-night," said Launce to himself, leaning his little dark face above the drowsing face of stone. Nothing moved in the plantations; nothing flickered on the lawn. Faunus was no more than a cunning stone carved long ago by men forgotten. "He's not here to-night," said Launce gravely to the mice, "he's gone away. I must make haste."

The mice cuddled closer. All sense of imminent life was gone from the faun. Launce glanced into the darkness.

Was he free of the stone at last, let loose, a little flitting shape, stone-white yet shadowy—a swift beast-shape half-fashioned into man—snuffing at Lucia's bed of daffodils, cutting down the irises with heedless hooves, peering into the windows with wrinkled eyelids, calling wordlessly in the night—a happy thing of darkness, knowing neither hope nor regret? Launce took out some rose-leaves from the pot-pourri jar, and the bottle of wine; he drew the cork with his teeth, and it squeaked and made him jump. He held it in readiness.

"O Faun," whispered Launce, shakily, in a desperate hurry, "I salute you. Hail, O Faun. Drink, and remember. Vale." And he poured out the wine.

He stood staring, waiting for the miracle, and the wine ran in a dark stain on the little faun's breast, as if he were hurt to death. There came no wonder but the wonder of the wind.

The hush seemed to thrill, and the herald of the great gust ran rustling through the garden, stirring the leaves to the sound of innumerable little hurrying hooves. Launce felt that he was ringed round by hundreds of capering creatures suddenly imprisoned. But the force let loose was only the wind.

The great gust seemed to leap from the heart of the sky. The stars reeled and went out. Sand and surf the wind caught up as with hands and flung across the wall. For a moment all the powers of the night seemed to be let loose in storm and ruin. Then with a great voice they passed out to sea, and there was stillness again, save for the noise as of numberless little pattering feet among the restless leaves. Launce snatched the mice and ran up the larch plantation like a rabbit, toward the lighted windows of the house. The whole night and all it held seemed to be sweeping after him on threatening wings.

There were voices and footsteps on the gravel, and a beam of light from the gun-room window. His godfather and uncle Will were walking there and talking together. Launce, a mouse in each hand, was just going to fling himself upon them regardless of the result, when something in his uncle's voice, something in the younger man's attitude

as he listened, held him back. Just what was passing he neither saw nor heard. But he saw Geoffrey swing round as quick as thought and strike the other heavily.

Launce fell on his knees in the shadow of the trees. He was too frightened to move. He longed to hide his eyes or his ears, but he had to hold the restless little mice. His world was breaking and falling.

His uncle caught the raised hand, and his own was swung back for the answering blow. Launce could see Geoffrey's face, steady and white as he waited for it, his uncle's flushed and dark. "Are you mad, Geoffrey?" he asked, breathlessly.

There was no answer. To the frightened boy, unwillingly listening, it seemed a silence so dead that the thudding of his own heart must be heard. The night was calm again, yet the whole of life as he knew it was in disorder.

"Are you mad, Geoffrey?" asked William again, but in a different voice.

Geoffrey's face seemed to be a little raised, a little paler, but again there was no answer.

William's fist dropped; he stepped back, and passed his hand over his forehead in a bewildered way. "It's a queer thing," he said, rather unsteadily, "but I can't hit you back. You're like a younger brother, you know, Geoff. I can't hit you."

And at that a sort of fury seemed to flash into the younger man's face. "You must," he cried, hoarsely.

"Gad, but I can't, my good fellow," said William, with a twisted sort of smile, putting his hands in his pockets. "After all, 'tis not the first time we've hit each other."

"This is different, and you know it."

"Yes. But I daresay it was my fault. I had no right to question you."

"You have no right to shame me so."

"Hey?"

"I say," cried Geoffrey, passionately, "you have no right to shame me so. I was in the wrong, and you know it. You've no right to keep me in the wrong forever."

"D'you want me to call you out? Geoff, Geoff, what the devil's the matter with you to-night?"

"The devil, perhaps, as you say. I'm not drunk. And strike you must, or that blow of mine will stand between us forever. If you of your generosity forget it, shall I—? Strike me, Will, strike me—hard."

William raised his hand slowly, and slowly lowered it. "If you're not drunk with wine, you are with something else, I think," he said, roughly. "I cannot hit you when I'm not in a rage, and that's the end of it. Go and get Simmons to pump on your head."

"It's not the end of it. Here, then, strike with this." He caught up a heavy hunting-crop from the window-sill of the gun-room, and thrust it into William's hand. "Strike with this."

"I will not—"

"It would not be the first time you had thrashed me."

"This is different, and you know it—"

"I know it." He slipped off his coat, and stood. "Hit with that," he said, between his teeth.

Fired by the fierier soul, William raised the whip and struck, hastily and heedlessly, all bewildered. It was a whip used for Monseigneur in his vicious moods, and a little flick of rending linen and a thread of scarlet followed across Geoffrey's shoulders. William flung down the whip with an oath. "There, you madman," he cried, "I'll do no more," and for an instant it seemed to the trembling boy that he had Geoffrey in his arms.

They stood silent, with only the dim stars and the cries of the peewits above the garden. The wind had died down again and all the leaves were still.

"Geoff," said William at last, almost in a whisper, "is it Lucia?"

Geoffrey raised his eyes slowly. "You shall have the truth to-night, if you never have it again. To-night, there's no honour in a lie. Yes."

"I should have guessed. Since—Italy?"

"I do not know. Since we came here, something that slept seemed to wake. As the tide covers that beach there—I could not help it. I fought it. If she knows, it is not from any word of mine, Will."

"You need not tell me that, thank God."

Geoffrey groaned. "But it was no use, so I was going. I must go to-morrow."

"Yes, you must go at once. I'm all at sea. Don't think I'm not sorry. I'm so damnably sorry I don't know what to say. This marrying and giving in marriage always costs something; I'd rather it had cost my right hand than you. Gad, this is a queer way of talk. I suppose I ought to want to murder you. But I love you and trust you, Geoff, to the hilt. And you'll go to-morrow—?"

"Yes. I shall never come back."

"So it is as bad as that? I hope Lucia guesses nothing. She is a tender-hearted child, and it would distress her terribly. This is a queer life, Geoff, and it will be a queer house without you somewhere about half the time. There's always a price to pay."

"Yes, there is always a price to pay. This time I pay it," said Geoffrey, turning away. But he came back. "Give me one thing out of all you have," he said steadily. "I was to ride with her to-morrow morning. May I have that—still?"

For a moment William was silent. Then his face cleared. "After all, she might suspect and be distressed if you did not. Yes, yes, go, Geoff. I told you I trusted you. God help you."

"God help us all," said Geoffrey, looking at him strangely, and caught up his coat, and went. As he passed, the sky seemed to thrill once more, and the heralding air breathed through the garden, waking the leaves to a sound of innumerable soft voices and following feet.

IV

Launce dreamed in the early dawn that he was on board ship, and that the little faun of the garden had the wheel, and was steering the ship through a sea of dried rose-leaves. When Mrs. Annerley came in to wake him, he realized that Great House was creaking and straining like a ship in the battle of heavy seas. But the battle was of the winds.

"Is it a storm, Mrs. Annerley?" Launce sat up in bed

awestruck. He could see the leaded panes of the window all blurred with driven sand, but he could not hear it. There was no lull in the wind.

"Come up this last hour, it has, my lamb." The old lady looked very pale and troubled. "Such a tempest I never did see in so short a while. 'Twas gusty, so to say, all night, and this gale came up with the sun."

"Which way is it blowing?"

"Straight in from the sea, oh dear, and driving the waves before it like the roaring lions seeking what they may devour in the Scriptures."

"But there's nothing to devour here, Mrs. Annerley."

"There's Great House and the lives of it, my lamb. You pick up white shells in the onion-beds, don't you, dearie? Where the sea has been once, the sea will be again. And they two—my lovely ladyship and him I used to give jam to for love of his fair face when he shouldn't have had it, and he two feet high—oh dear, oh dear. I hope I know my place, but tides may deal the judgments of the Almighty no less than thunderbolts.

Launce dressed quickly and ran downstairs, wild with excitement. At the door of the breakfast-room he stopped. It was empty save for his uncle, who sat at the head of the table, staring out of the window into the grey fury of the day. He moved no more than a man of stone, and his face had the bleak colour of stone.

Launce slipped silently into his place. A pale servant attended to him, but the man's eyes were all the time covertly on his master.

Presently Uncle Will spoke, without turning his head. "Send for Simmons again," he said, in a dead voice.

Old Simmons was there so quickly he must have been waiting outside. He was very wet. His eyes also were on his master with that look Launce could not read, nor see without fear.

"What time did you say they started?" Was that indeed Uncle Will's voice?

"Soon after daylight, sir, quite early. Mr. Geoffrey, he had the horses ready, and her ladyship came down the side stairs."

"And you heard them say nothing—as to where they were going?"

"Nothing at all, sir. Mr. Geoffrey said nothing. They turned down the beach road—"

A sound of despair was in the room, yet the master had not spoken.

"—down the beach road. The weather was not near so bad then, but, such as it was, they gave no heed to it."

"I see. They gave no heed to it. Could they shelter in the dunes?"

"Hardly, sir. Mr. Geoffrey would not risk her ladyship near the quicksands, and the dunes will be moving."

"Could they shelter anywhere?"

"No, sir. Old Bassey, the shepherd, is downstairs, and he says the North road and the Marshcotes road are not to be passed. The walls and the dyke at Cotes will be gone by this, and the roads swept away." He and the waiting servant exchanged a look so swift it was almost imperceptible.

"Well?" Uncle Will did not move nor turn his head. A carving-fork lay on the table, and he picked it up idly, snapping the spring-guard with the click of a trigger.

"The best thing to do will be to run back for it, sir."

"Run back?"

"Yes. Gallop for home before the sea gets over the beach. And that's what Master Geoff's doing, I'll wager." Simmons' face was that of the well-trained servant, but his voice betrayed it. It broke at "Master Geoff." "You can trust Master Geoff, sir," he went on.

"Trust him?" repeated Uncle Will, snapping the guard. "Thank you, Simmons, that will do. You had better change your wet coat." He got up and strode out of the room; they heard him open the outer door, heard the wind leap in like a waiting enemy.

"He's gone to the terraces," said Simmons quickly to the other man, and followed him.

Launce ran and thrust his hand into the old man's. "I must go too," he said piteously.

Simmons wrapped a shawl round him and they went out into the gardens.

The wind and the sand were almost more than sight and

breath could bear. Launce felt that the life must be blown out of his body. Another old man, Bassey, the shepherd, staggered up to them, caught his other arm, and the three struggled to the lower terrace where nearly all the household were gathered. Uncle Will was standing at the head of the stone steps; the others stayed apart from him. Only their eyes never left him, except to look along the lost and blinded road for Geoffrey and Lucia.

Sheltered by the other, Launce could catch breath and think. He longed to go to his uncle, but dared not. He was so sorry for Uncle Will, so fond of him. But oh, the others, the others—

"D'ye think he'll bring her back?" shouted one of the grooms. He shouted, but it came as a whisper.

"There'll be naught else to do—"

"Nay, I didn't mean that. Will he get her through?"

"If Master Geoffrey had the mind, Simmons, he'd get her through hell."

The cook broke in angrily. "Bad luck to you, and Master Launce at your very gaiters, and he but a child."

"The surf's at the edge of the road."

"And the tide far from the full. Never was such a sea, Simmons. The whole garden'll go, and the terraces. Looky. There's the drive gone—"

The long drive that wound down by easy levels to the beach road ended now in a crumbling little cliff of gravel. Cries broke out from the group of servants.

"The shake of the waves—"

"'Tis like as if the land were falling of itself."

"Lord ha' mercy on them."

Uncle Will strode over to the group. "Is it any good going out?"

"Not any use, sir. What two can't do, twenty couldn't do. And there's not a horse in the stables that's devil enough to fight with this except the old blood-mare and Monseigneur, and that's the truth, sir."

"Yes, sir, that's the truth."

William turned in silence and went back to his post

One of the maids broke into a keening cry, shrill and wild as a gull's, but the wind whipped it from her lips.

A great wave broke in thunder on the beach. They could scarcely hear it: they felt the shock in the earth they stood on. The wind snatched the foam from the crest, tore the foam into mist, and drove the mist through the garden. When they cleared the salt from their eyes they saw a young fir-seedling, growing just outside the lower terrace, heel over in a slow arc and vanish.

The old shepherd turned a white face to Simmons. "Th' water's o'er the beach road."

"Lord ha' mercy on 'em."

Gradually they one and all drew to the head of the stone steps where the master stood, and huddled behind him, silent now. He did not heed them. He was as still as the little faun, who lay smiling and sleeping in the storm; the pale light gleamed on the marble till it had the likeness of a body from which the life had gone like a flown bird.

Launce looked at his uncle fearfully, and his face, colourless and streaming with spray, was like the face of a drowned man. The child looked away trembling, and would not look back. And he it was at last who pointed and screamed: "I see them! They're there—"

"Where, then?"

"The boy's dreaming. 'Tis too late—"

"There's naught but the scud and the driving weed."

But William stooped his face to the child's. "Where did you see them, laddie?" His face was torn with pain and dripping with foam, but it was no longer dead. The boy did not fear it.

"There—oh, Uncle Will, quite close—for a minute—when the spindrift cleared—"

They all surged forward. His uncle was down on the lower step with a leap, and as he stood the sea broke to his knee. There was nothing but the flying spray and the sting of the sand.

"He saw naught at all."

"Back, I tell ye. Keep hold of the child. He's all crazy-like—"

Launce was sobbing and screaming to follow his uncle. "I saw them, I tell you—quite close—"

The maid who had cried before tossed her arms and shrieked

against the wind, her face white and wild. "Master Geoffrey—he's there—"

"What's got the silly wench?"

"Maybe she's right. And her ladyship, you fool?"

"Aye, there's two—"

And in a moment they saw them, clear and close under the wall of the lower terrace, fighting forward foot by foot. The horses huddled so near together they could not see one from the other, but Geoffrey rode on the outside, sheltering Lucia, and it seemed that his arm was round her, either to hold her in the saddle or to catch her from it if need were. Then the scud hid them.

Another great wave rose, and the wild-eyed maid shrieked terribly. The cook laid a hand over her mouth, but she suddenly slid down in a heap on the gravel and was quiet. But no one heeded her. The younger men were down on the lowest step with their master, their arms interlaced. And the great wave broke and buried them to the waist.

"Where are they to get up?"

"The drive's gone and the road's gone, and the surf breaks on the wall. 'Tis all sliding sand—"

"Here, here." Suddenly as an apparition, the riders showed from the gloom but a few yards from the steps. Geoffrey had the mare by the bridle, and the waves broke on the great bay. Both horses were reeling on their legs, the surf creaming at their withers and the sand sucking under their hooves. Monseigneur's nostrils were blood-bright, his eyes dreadful. On the steps, the men were holding their master back by main force.

"Wait an instant, sir—"

"Give Mr. Geoffrey a chance, sir. He knows what he's doing—"

"Ah, look!" Monseigneur's shoulder, Geoffrey's strength were thrusting the mare at the steps. Her head was almost within their reach. She saw safety and flung forward, with the last of her strength, up and away from the water. A dozen hands were at her bridle. They had her up four steps before she crumpled forward and fell, and William leaped back with Lucia.

He gave no more than a look at the life in her beautiful

dazed face, and let them take her, and turned to his friend. But it was long enough.

Heard even above the storm, there was a great cry.

The men on the steps, waiting with arms locked for Monseigneur as they had waited for the mare, were up to the waist in surf. But a dozen strong hands were ready for the bridle as the horse rose pawing for an instant at the lowest stair. Someone screamed: "Jump for it, Master Geoff." But Geoffrey stayed in the saddle, the backwash scoured the sand from beneath Monseigneur's hooves, and somehow the ready hands fell short. Half the sea seemed to raise itself and hang poised above the beach and the gardens, a grey wall curbed and ramparted with running white. They saw them an instant clear—the dreadful straining head of the great horse; Geoffrey with his hand up and his face raised. It was not pale or lost, but flushed with the very fulness of life, the face of one who looks on a thing that is good. His lips moved. It seemed that something went past them on the wind, a voice and a cry—"Lucia—"

Then the great wave fell.

Launce flung face down on the gravel like the kitchen-maid. The world went out. Voices and wild words passed him.

"He reined him back, I tell you, as I'm a living man!"

"What d'ye mean?"

"There, at the foot of the steps. We'd a' had Monseigneur as we had the mare. Sim's hand was on the bridle. But Master Geoff reined him back."

"For God's sake, don't say so to the master, then. He's like mad down there. We had to hold him, or he'd have killed Sim that caught him out of the rush."

"He reined Monseigneur back, or we'd a' had him up the steps before the wave fell. We'd a' saved him." The groom seemed to be sobbing.

"Not against his will, lad. He's al'ays took his will, has our Master Geoff—"

"And her ladyship—?"

"Hush. None 'll know that—"

Someone picked Launce up, and carried him indoors

and put him to bed ; but the world did not come back. The house was silently astir. Mrs. Annerley, weeping, sat by the child all day, her prayer-book in her hand. The storm was full of voices—the voice of a man who walked up and down the terrace calling openly for his friend, and the voice that cried for ever in the wind, would cry for evermore—“ Lucia, Lucia—”

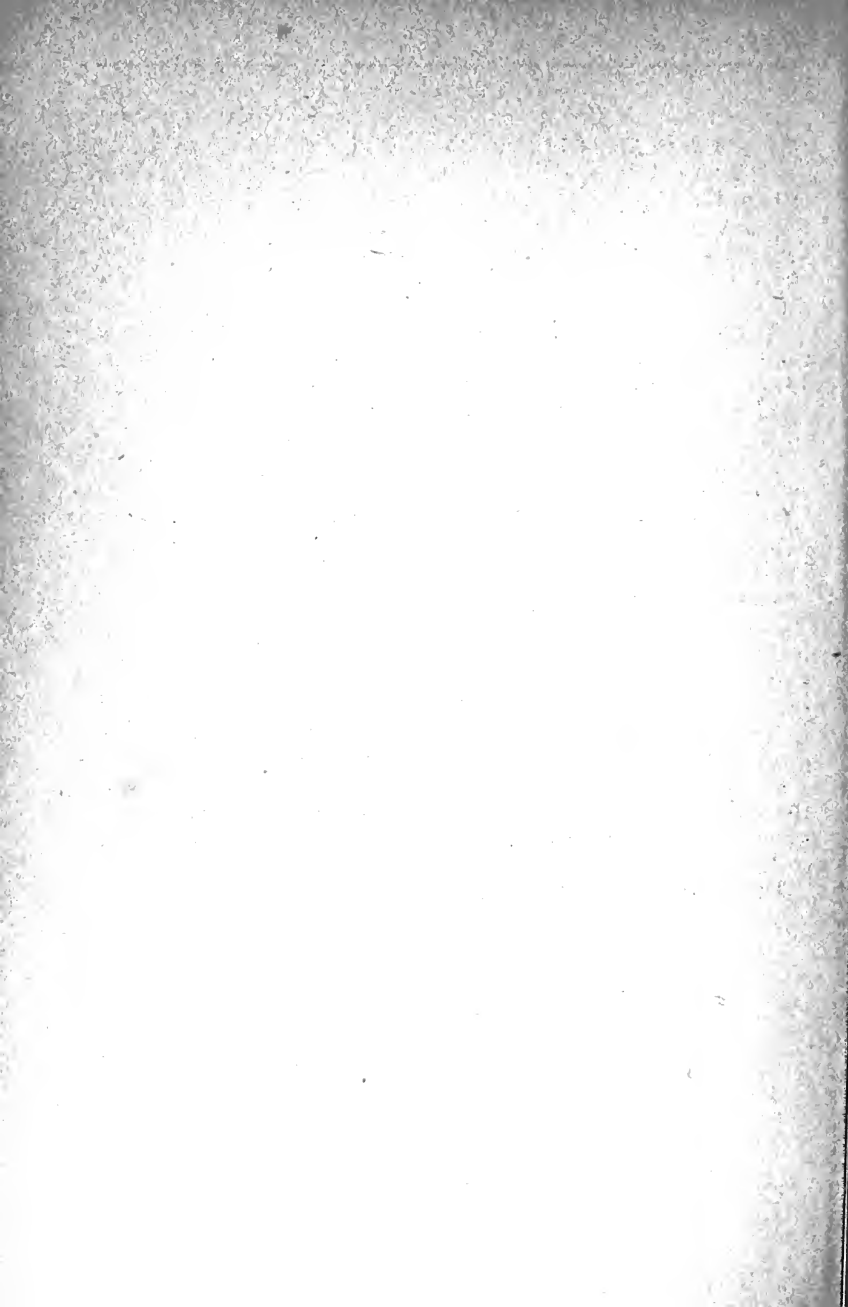
At night the wind lulled and he could hear Mrs. Annerley reading softly—“ Graciously look upon our afflictions. Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts. Mercifully forgive the sins of Thy people.” He fell asleep, and awoke to the world again. But it was a changed world.

The wind was still, the sky blown cold and clear. A great swell broke in silver on the beach. All the wall and the lower terrace was gone, the flowers and the young larches were gone, and the sleeping faun was gone also, swept away and buried in the ruin of the sand. All along the line of the breakers, men moved quietly, searching.

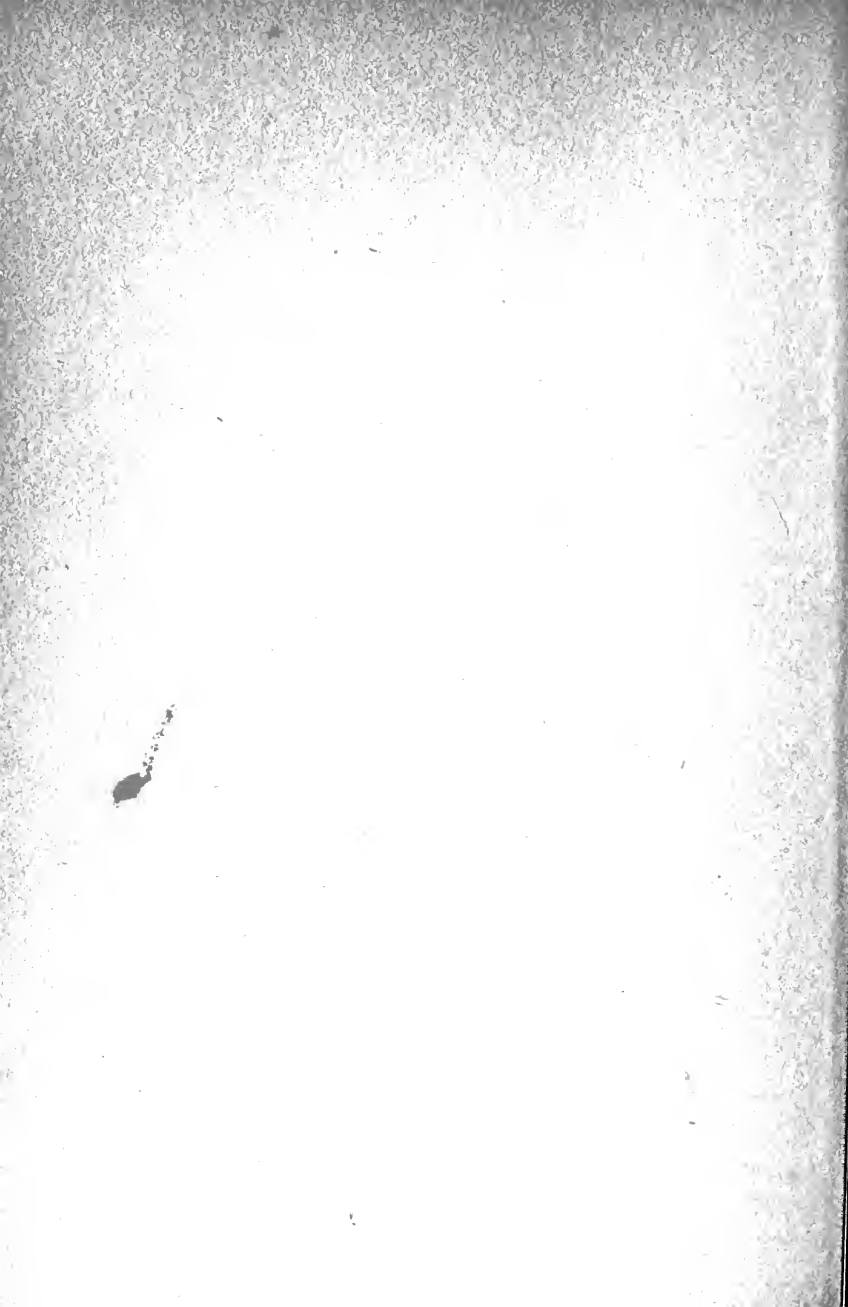
Launce took the white mice and ran to the stables. He found old Simmons sitting on a bucket in Monseigneur's empty stall, his hands over his ears, and Launce knew that both listened to the same thing. He would have no need to explain. He spoke with a sob. “ I can't bear it any more. Take me home, Simmons, take me home.”

So the old man took him home, to the dove-house and the brown rabbit and Pansy and the kind, mild faces he knew best, which should presently heal him and set him at rest.

But he was a child no more.



LUCK



LUCK

I

THERE were four bunks in the shanty, and three of them were filled.

Ohlsen lay in one, a great bulk under the Hudson Bay Company blankets, breathing like a bull; in the next was Forbes, with eyes as quick as a mink's, and now red rimmed from snow blindness, twinkling from time to time over his yellowish furs. Nearest the door was Lajeune, singing in his sleep. In one corner an old Indian cowered, as little regarded as the rags and skins in which he was hidden; and Desmond sat by the stove, drinking to his luck, fingering it and folding it.

It was all there in a bag—raw gold, pure gold, the food of joy. At the weight of it in his rough palm, Desmond chattered and chuckled with delight. He had sat there talking and laughing for hours, while the glow of the stove grew darker and the cold crept in. Little blots of snow from the snow-shoes, first melting, had turned again to dark ice on the floor; the red light clung to them until each little circle seemed to be one of blood. Outside the world trembled under the shafts of the bitter stars; but Desmond, with the very fuel of life in his hand, was warm.

Dreams ran in his brain like a tide and dripped off his tongue in words. They were strangely innocent dreams of innocent things; sunlight on an old wall, honey, a girl with sandy eyebrows, and yellow ducklings.

"And maybe there'll be a garden, with fruit you can pick off the bushes. 'Twas under a thorn-bush she used to stand, with the wind snapping her print gown. Or maybe I'll see more of the world first in an easy fashion, never a drink scarce, and no man my better at it. I know how a gentleman should behave. Are you hearing me, boys?"

Ohlsen breathed as slowly and deeply as a bull. Forbes blinked a moment over the greasy furs and said, "I'm hearing you." Lajeune gave a sudden little call in his sleep, like a bird.

"They're all asleep, like so many hogs," said Desmond, with a maudlin wonder; "they don't care. Two years we've struggled and starved together in this here freezing hell, and now my luck's come, and they don't care. Well, well."

He stared resentfully at the bunks. He could see nothing of Ohlsen but blanket, yet Ohlsen helped him to a new outfit when he lost everything in a snow-slide. Forbes was only an unheeding head of grimy fur, yet once he had pulled Desmond out of a log-jam. And Lejeune had nursed him laughingly when he hurt his foot with a pick. Yet now Lejeune cared nothing; he was asleep, his head flung back, showing his smooth, lean throat and a scar that ran across it, white on brown. Desmond felt hurt. He took another drink, strode over to the bunk, and shook him petulantly.

"Don't ye hear when a friend talks t' ye?"

Lajeune did not move, yet he was instantly awake. His eyes, so black that they showed no pupil, stared suddenly into Desmond's muddled blue ones. His right hand gripped and grew rigid.

Desmond, leaning over him, was sobered by something in the breathless strain of that stare. He laughed uneasily.

"It's only me, Jooney. Was you asleep? I'm sorry."

He backed off bewildered, but young Lajeune smiled and yawned, showing his red tongue curled like a wolf's.

"Still the gold, my friend?" he asked, drowsily.

"I—I can't seem to get used to it, like," explained Desmond; "I have to talk of it. I know I'm a fool, but a man's luck takes him all ways. You go to sleep, young Jooney. I won't talk to you no more."

"Nor before your old savage in the corner, *hein*?"

Desmond glanced at the heap of rags in the corner.

"Hom? What's the matter? Think he'll steal it? Why, there's four of us, and even an Injun can have a corner of my shack for an hour or two to-night. I reckon," finished Desmond, with a kind of gravity, "as my luck is making me soft. It takes a man all ways."

Lajeune yawned, grinned, flung up his left arm, and was instantly asleep again. He looked so young in his sleep, that Desmond was suddenly moved to draw the blanket over him. In the dim light he saw Forbes worn and grizzled, the wariness gone out of him, a defeated old man with horrible eyes. Ohlsen's hand lay over the edge of the bunk, his huge fingers curved helplessly, like a child's. Desmond felt inarticulately tender to the three who had toiled by his side and missed their luck. He piled wood on the stove, saying, "I must do something for the boys. They're good boys."

At the freshened roar of the stove the old Indian in the corner stirred and lifted his head, groping like an old turtle in the sunlight. He had a curious effect of meaningless blurs and shadows. Eye and memory could hold nothing of his insignificance. Only under smoked and puckered lids the flickering glitter of his eyes pricked in a meaning unreadable. Desmond looked at him with the wide good nature born of his luck.

"I ain't going to turn ye out, Old Bones," he said.

The eyes steadied on him an instant, and the old shadow spoke fair English in the ghost of a voice.

"Thanks. You give grub. I eat, I warm, I rest. Now I go."

"Jest as ye like. But have a drink first." He pushed over the dregs of the whiskey bottle.

The old man seized it; seemed to hold it to his heart. While he could get whiskey he might drink and forget; when he could get it no more, he must remember and die. He drank, Lethe and Paradise in one, and handed back the bottle.

"How," he said. "You good man. Once I had things to give, now nothing. Nothing but dreams."

"Dreams, is it, Old Bones?"

The eyes were like cunning sparks.

"Dreams, yes," he said with a stealthy indrawing of breath. "You good man. I give you three dreams. See."

With a movement so swift the eye could hardly follow it. he caught three hot wood-coals from the ash under the stove and flung them on the floor at Desmond's feet. He bent forward, and under his breath they woke to a moment's flame. The strangeness of his movements held Desmond, and he also

bent forward, watching. He had an instant's impression that the coals were burning him fiercely somewhere between the eyes, that the bars of personality were breaking, that he was falling into some darkness that was the darkness of death. Before his ignorance could find words for his fear, the old Indian leaned back, the fire fled, and the spent coals were no more than rounds of empty ash, which the old man took in his hands.

"Dreams," he said, with something that might have been a laugh. He blew the ash like little grey feathers toward the sleeping men in the bunks. His eyes were alive, fixed on Desmond with a meaning unreadable. He thrust his face close. "You good man. You give me whiskey. I give you three dreams, little dreams—for luck."

Desmond was staring at the little floating feathers of wood ash. As they slowly sank and settled, he heard the door close and felt a sharp stab of cold. The old Indian had gone ; Desmond could hear his footsteps dragging over the frozen crust of the snow for a little while. He got up and shook himself. The drink had died out of him ; he felt himself suddenly and greatly weary of body and mind. The fire would last till morning. "Dreams—dreams, for luck!" he muttered, as he rolled into the fourth bunk. He was ready for sleep. And as he lay down and yielded to the oncoming of sleep, as a weed yields to the tide, he knew of a swift, clear, certainty that he would dream.

II

HE opened his eyes to the pale flood of day ; Lajeune was cooking pork and making coffee ; Ohlsen was mending snow shoes ; Forbes bent over his bunk, black against the blind square of the frozen window, feeling blindly with his hands, and snuffing a little as he spoke :

"We'd ha' let you sleep on, but we wanted to know what you'd be doing. Will ye stay here with me and rest—I'm all but blind the day—or will ye go into Fort Recompense with Jooney here and the dogs, and put the dust in safety ? Or will ye try the short cut across the pass with Ohlsen ? "

Desmond stretched, grunted, and hesitated. He felt curiously unwilling to decide. But Forbes was waiting, his yellow fingers twitching on the end of the bunk.

"Oh, I dunno," he said. "What's the hurry? Well—I guess I'll try the pass with Ohlsen."

"Right." Ohlsen nodded his heavy head, for he seldom spoke. He had the physique men always associate with a kind and stupid fidelity. Desmond said of him, "Them that talks most ain't the best at heart." Desmond said it to himself as he rolled out of the bunk for breakfast.

Forbes stayed in his bunk, and made little moaning animal noises while he fed. Lajeune bubbled over with quick laughter. Desmond beamed on everyone and talked of his luck. Ohlsen sat immovable, working his jaws like an ox, watching Desmond with his small, pale eyes.

He did not speak as they drew on their furs and packed the gold; nor as they turned out of the shack, shutting the door swiftly behind them, and faced the stinging splendour of the windy winter day. The cold had lessened with the sunrise, but what cold there was the wind took and drove to the bone. The air was filled with a glittering mist of blown snow, and all the lower slopes of the hills and the climbing spruce forests were hidden. Above the *poudre* the mountains lifted like iron in the unpitied day, and every snowfield and glacier was crowned with a streaming feather of white against a hard turquoise sky.

"You think we'll get through?" asked Desmond, doubtfully.

"Ay t'ank so." Ohlsen was striding heavily, tirelessly, just behind his shoulder. His grey eyes, still fixed on Desmond, were like little bits of glacier ice inset above his high cheek bones.

"We may."

"We may. It ain't far." Desmond was talkative. "This gold weighs heavy. I like the colour o' gold. Ohlsen, you got any children?"

"Ay, got two kids."

"Wisht I had. Maybe I will, though—little boy 'n' gal, with kind o' gold hair. See here, you ever had a garden?"

"No."

"I've me garden on me back here, hey? With them blue things that smell, and hens. You come and see me, Ohlsen, and you'll have the best there is."

"T'anks. Ay like fresh eggs."

"So do I. And apples. Say, Ohlsen, I'm sorry this luck ain't for you."

Ohlsen did not answer or slacken his heavy, stooping stride against the wind. The curved hills opened slowly, swung aside. The spruce stood up, came nearer, and closed in around them like the outposts of a waiting army. The wind roared through the trees like a flood of which the surf was snow.

"Do you think we'll do it?" shouted Desmond again and Ohlsen answered:

"Ay t'ank so."

In a little while the trees were a dark mass beneath them, and they were out on the bare heights, fighting with the wind for every foothold. Desmond staggered under it, but Ohlsen seemed untiring, climbing very close at his shoulder. The glare of the sun seared their eyes, but they had no heat of it. In all the vast upheaval of the hills, in all the stark space of the sky, there was no warmth, no life.

Something took Desmond by the throat.

"We'll not do it," he cried, to Ohlsen. "Let's turn back."

For answer Ohlsen unstrapped the heavy pack of gold, fastened it on his shoulders, and went on. This time he was ahead, and his huge body sheltered Desmond from the wind.

"I been drinking too much," thought Desmond; "and here's Ohlsen having to do my work for me. It ain't right."

They were on a high ridge, and the wind was at its worst. On the left lay a precipice, and the dark masses of the spruce. On the right the depths were veiled with glittering silver, now and then shot through with the blue-green gleam of a glacier. It was fair going for a steady head, but the wind was dangerous. It took Desmond, as with hands, and thrust him to his knees at the narrowing of the ledge. He slipped a little. The dark-grey ice, white veined, gave him no hold. He lost his head, slipped a little farther, and the white driven foam of snow and cloud above the glacier was suddenly visible. He called to Ohlsen.

Ohlsen could not have heard, yet he turned and came slowly back. Desmond could have raged at him for his slowness if his lips had not been so stiff and dry. Inside his fur mitts his hands were suddenly wet. Gently he slid a little farther, and the wind-driven white below was plainer, cut through with turquoise as with a sword. He shut his eyes. And when he opened them Ohlsen had stopped and was standing quietly watching him.

Desmond shrieked hoarsely, for he understood. Between the two drove the torrent of the wind, shutting slayer and all but slain into a separate prison of silence. But even the wind did not stir Ohlsen; he stood like a gray rock, watching Desmond. Presently he leaned forward, hands on knees, his back humped grotesquely under the pack, as the cruel or the curious might watch the struggles of a drowning kitten. Desmond was shaken to his fingers by the terrible thudding of his heart. He could not make a sound. Earth and sky flashed away. There remained only the gray inhuman shape beyond the barrier of the wind.

Presently that also flashed away. Yet, as Desmond fell, he was aware of light, a great swift relief, for he knew that he dreamed.

Then came darkness.

III

It was a darkness glittering with stars. Such stars as the men of the South, the men of the cities, never see. Each was a blazing world hung in nothingness, rayed with sapphire and rose. Now and then the white ice-blink ran over and died beyond them in the spaces where even stars were not. Desmond was lying on his back, staring at them through a cranny in his sleeping-bag. He knew where he was, yet in his brain was a sort of cold confusion. He seemed to hear Forbes speaking.

"Will ye stay here with me and rest—I'm all but blind the day—or will ye go into Fort Recompense with Jooney here and the dogs, and put the dust in safety? Or will ye try the short cut across the pass with Ohlsen?"

"And here I am, half-way to the fort, and sleeping out with

Jooney and the dogs," Desmond muttered ; " but I can't remember coming."

Yet, as he turned in his sleeping-bag, his knowledge of his whereabouts was exact. He was in a stony little gully beyond Fachtette, where high banks cut off the wind and ground willows gave firing. The huskies were asleep and warm in deep drift under the bank, after a full meal of dried salmon.

" I'll say this for young Jooney," said Desmond, drowsily, " he's got some sense with dogs."

Lajeune was beside him, asleep in another bag. Between them was the pack of gold and the sledge harness. And the great plain, he knew, ran north and south of the very lip of the gully, silver under the stars, ridged and rippled by the wind, like white sand of the sea. The wind was now still. The earth was again a star, bright, silent, and alone, akin to her sisters of the infinite heavens.

" There ain't so much gold in a place like this here," Desmond whispered, resentfully, to the night, " but jest you wait till I get south-east again." He was filled with blind longing for red brick, asphalt, and crowded streets ; even the hens and ducklings were not enough. He hungered in this splendour of desolation for the little tumults of mankind. It seemed as if the stars laughed.

" There ain't nothing my gold won't get me," said Desmond more loudly. His breath hung in little icicles on the edges of his spy-hole. It was cruelly cold. He drew his hood closer round his head, and thrust it out of the bag.

Lajeune was gone.

He did not feel afraid ; only deadly cold and sick as he struggled to his feet. Under their shelter of canvas and snow he was alone ; everything else was gone. He fell on his hands and knees, digging furiously in the trodden snow, like a dog.

The gold was gone also.

" My luck," whispered Desmond, stupidly. " My luck."

He was still on his knees, shaping a little rounded column of snow ; suppose it might be Lajeune's throat, and he with his hands on each side of it—so. Lajeune's dark face seemed to lie beneath him, but it was not touched with fear, but with laughter. He was laughing, as the stars had laughed, at

Desmond and his luck. Desmond dashed the snow away with a cry.

He scrambled out of the gully. The dog-trail was easy to read, running straight across the silvery plain. He began to run along it.

As he ran he admired Lajeune very much. With what deadly quietness and precision he must have worked! The gully and the deserted camp were a gray streak behind him, were gone. He was running in Lajeune's very footprints, and he was sure he ran at an immense speed. The glittering levels reeled away behind him. A star flared and fell, staining the world with gold. Desmond had forgotten his gold. He had forgotten food and shelter, life and death. He could think of nothing but Lajeune's brown throat with the scar across it. That throat, his own hands on each side of it, and an end for ever to the singing and the laughter.

He thought Lajeune was near at hand, laughing at him. He felt the trail, and searched. The dark face was everywhere, and the quick laughter; but silence was waiting.

Again he knelt and groped in the snow; but he could feel nothing firm and living. He tore off his mitts, and groped again, but there was only the snow, drifting in his fingers like dust. Lajeune was near at hand, yet he could not find him. He got up and began to run in circles. His feet and hands were heavy and as cold as ice, and his breath hurt; but Lajeune was alive and warm and lucky and laughing.

He fell, got up, and fell again. The third time he did not get up, for he had caught young Lajeune at last. The brown throat was under his hands, and the stricken face. He, Desmond, was doing all the laughing, for Lajeune was dead.

"My luck, Jooney, my luck," chuckled Desmond.

His head fell forward, and the dry snow was like dust in his mouth. Darkness covered the stars.

IV

IN the darkness and the shadow something moved. Desmond was in his own bunk at the shack. There seemed to be an echo of words in the air, yet he knew that he had

slept for some time. He was not asleep now, yet sleep lay on him like a weight, and he could not move.

Forbes was silent, too. He was quite clear that he was alone with Forbes, and that the other two had gone prospecting beyond Fachtette. Forbes had asked him, "Will ye stay here with me and rest,—I'm all but blind the day,—or will ye go in to Fort Recompense with Jooney here and the dogs, and put the dust in safety? Or will ye try the short cut across the pass with Ohlsen?" And he knew he had chosen to stay in the shack with Forbes.

It was night. The shack was dark, save for the red glow of the stove, and something moved very softly in the dusk and the shadow.

Desmond, weighted with sleep, could not move; but he listened. Someone was shuffling very softly and slowly round the wall of the shack, pausing at the bunks. It was Forbes. He was snuffling to himself, as some little soft-nosed animal might snuffle, and feeling in his blind way with one yellowed hand.

Desmond was amused. "If I was to yell out, old Scotty'd have a fit," he thought. He decided to wait until Forbes was quite near, and then yell, and hear the old man curse. Old Forbes' cursing was the admiration of the camps. Desmond lay very still and listened.

Forbes was coming nearer, feeling his way as if over unseen ground, and whimpering to himself very softly. Desmond could hear the scratch, scratch of his long-clawed fingers as he slipped his hand over the empty bunk near the door. He was silent and still for a minute, then the shuffling came again.

"I'll wait till he's at the foot o' my bunk," thought Desmond, grinning foolishly, "and then I'll bark like a dog. Used to do it in school when I was a kid and scare the teacher. Lord! how a bit of luck does raise a man's spirits!" He lay very quiet, grinning to himself in the dark.

Forbes' blind, bent head showed, swaying slightly, against the dull, red glow of the farther wall. A tremulous touch, as light as a falling leaf, fell on Desmond's foot, and suddenly he was stricken with the black, dumb terror of dreams; for he knew there was death in the touch of that hand.

The walls reeled about him, shot with streaks of red. He could feel the hand hovering lightly at his knee. The blind man's soft, whimpering breathing sounded close above him. But he could not move. His whole life was centred in the quivering nerves which recorded the touch of the blind man's hand.

It travelled very slowly and lightly up his body, and lingered above his heart. His life gathered there also like a cold flame. And he could not move.

Visions rose before him. The gold was under his head ; and he heard again the sound of wind in a garden among tall flowers, and thud of ripe apples falling, soft croons, and cluckings of hens, a whirring of the wings of doves. He saw a straight girl in a stiff print dress, with very blue eyes under brows and lashes the colour of sea-sand. He saw two children with hair the colour of gold.

The blind man moaned and bent waveringly near, his right hand gathered to his breast.

The flowers of the hollyhocks were gold, and the little ducks were gold, and gold sunlight lay on the gold hair of the children. "Gold," said Desmond, faintly—"gold ; my luck." The blind hand crept upward. Like a blown flame, the golden visions flickered and went out.

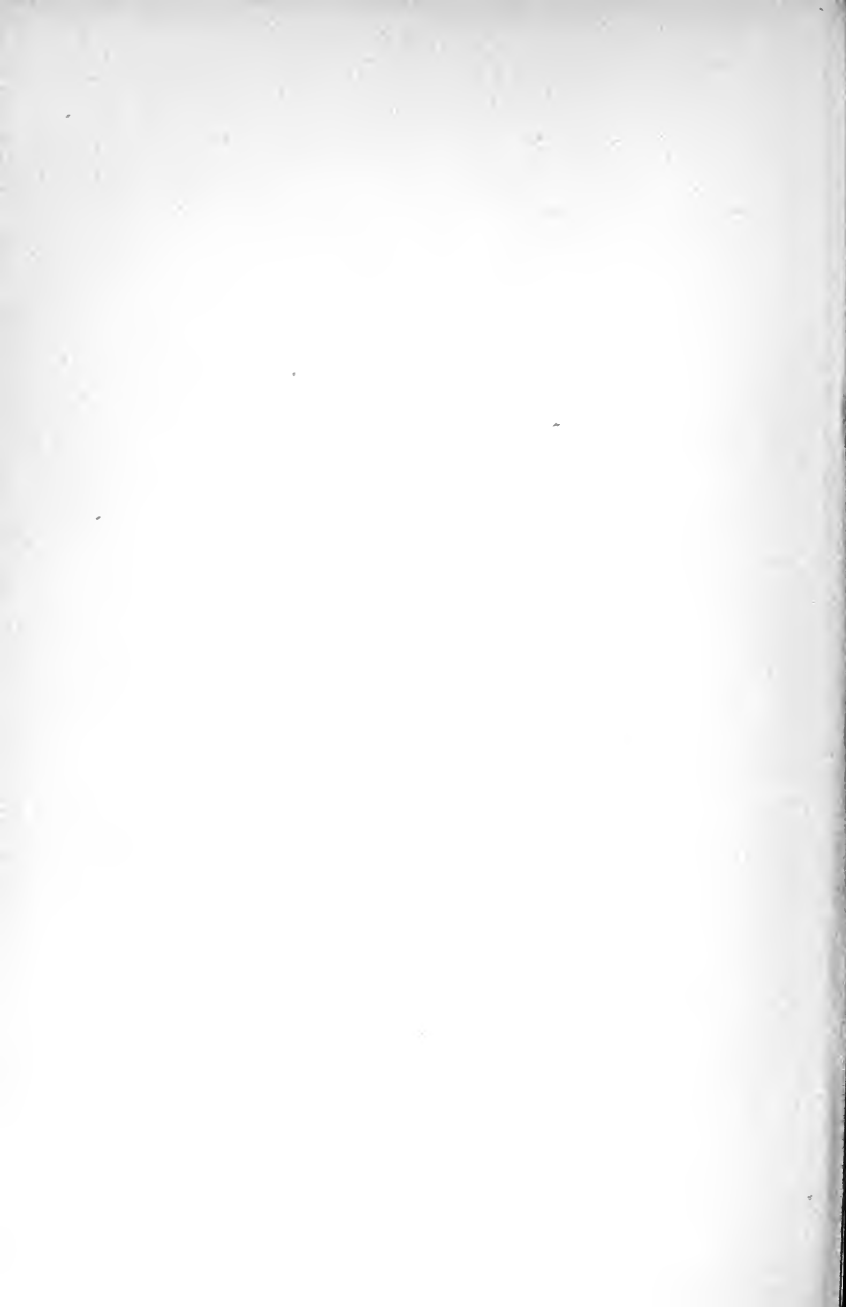
Desmond awoke, fighting upward out of darkness and the dreams of the night. He felt reality coming back to him as a tide comes back to a beach, and opened his eyes on a glad world. His terrors fell away from him. He came near to thanking God. Dark words he had dreamed, dark deeds, but they were not true. Thank God ! they were only dreams. He stirred in the bunk, sat up, and brushed a white feather of wood-ash from his sleeve. Only dreams !

Lajeune was cooking pork and making coffee ; Ohlsen was mending snow shoes ; Forbes bent over his bunk, black against the frozen window, feeling blindly with his hands and snuffing a little as he spoke :

"We'd ha' let you sleep on, but we wanted to know what you'd be doing. Will ye stay with me and rest—I'm all but blind the day—or will ye go into Fort Recompense with Jooney here and the dogs, and put the dust in safety ? Or will ye try the short cut across the pass with Ohlsen ?"

He stopped suddenly. Desmond shrank back slowly against the wall of the bunk, his eyes staring on them as a man stares on death, a fleck of froth on his lips. There was no sound in the shack but the quick breathing of four men.

CHEAP



CHEAP

RANSOME said that you might pick up specimens of all the unprettiest afflictions of body and soul in Herares ten years ago. He also said that when he saw any particularly miserable bit of human wreckage, white or brown, adrift on the languid tides of life about the jetty, he always said without further inquiry, "It's Henkel's house you're looking for. Turn to the left, and keep on turning to the left. And if God knew what went on under these trees, He'd have mercy on you. . . ."

The house was the last house on the last road of the town. You won't find it now, for no one would live in it after Henkel, and in a season or two the forest swamped it as the sea swamps a child's boat on the beach. It was a white house in a garden, and after rain the scent of vanilla and stephanotis rose round it like a fog. The fever rose round it like a fog, too, and that's why Henkel got it so cheap. No fever touched him. He lived there alone with a lot of servants—Indians. And they were all wrecks, Ransome said, broken down from accident or disease—wrecks that no one else would employ. He got them very cheap. When they died he got more.

Henkel was a large, soft, yellowish man. Ransome said, "I don't mind a man being large and yellowish, or even soft, in reason, but when he shines too, I draw the line." Henkel had thick hands with bent fingers, and large brown eyes. He was a Hollander Jew, and in that place he stood apart. For he didn't drink, or gamble, or fight, or even buy rubber. He was just a large, peaceful person who bought things cheap.

He was very clever. He always knew the precise moment, the outmost low-water mark, of a bargain. His house was full of things he'd bought cheap from wrecked companies or dying men, from the mahogany logs in the patio to the coils of telegraph wire in the loft. His clothes never fitted him,

for they belonged to men whom the fever had met on the way up the Mazzaron, and who had, therefore, no further use for clothes. The only things Henkel ever paid a fair price for were butterflies.

"I went to his house once," said Ransome. "Had to. A lame Indian in a suit of gaudy red-and-white stripes opened the door. I knew that striped canvas. It was the awnings of the old 'Lily Grant,' and I saw along the seams the smoke-marks of the fire that had burnt her inwards out Then the Indian opened the jalousies with a hand like a bundle of brown twigs, and the light shone through green leaves on the walls of the room. From ceiling to floor they flashed as if they were jewelled, only there are no jewels with just that soft bloom of colour. They were cases full of Henkel's butterflies.

"The Indian limped out, and Henkel came in. He was limping, too. I looked at his feet, and I saw that they were in a pair of someone else's tan shoes.

"That, and the whiff of the servants' quarter, made me feel a bit sick. I wanted to say what I had to say, and get out as quick as I could. But Henkel would show me his butterflies. Most of us in that place were a little mad on some point. I was myself. Henkel, he was mad on his butterflies. He told me the troubles he'd had, getting them from Indians and negroes, and how his men cheated him. He took it very much to heart, and snuffed as he spoke. 'And there's one I haven't got,' he said, 'one I've heard of, but can't find, and my lazy hounds of hombres can't find it either, it seems. It's one of the clear-wings—transparent. Here's a transparent silver one. But this new one is gold, transparent gold, and the spots are opaque gold.' His mouth fairly watered. 'I tell you, I will spend anything, anything, to get that gold butterfly. And if the natives can't or won't find it for me, my friend, I'll send for someone who can and will.'

"I quite believed him, though I was no friend of his. I didn't know much about butterflies, but I guessed that in Paris or London his collection would be beyond price. But I wasn't prepared, two months later, for Scott and his friend. . . .

"Derek Scott. Ever meet him? A very ordinary kind of young Northerner. He was only remarkable in having everything a little in excess of his type—a little squarer in jaw and shoulder, a little longer in nose and leg, a little keener of eye and slower of tongue. I'd never have looked at him twice as he landed from the dirty steamer with a lot of tin boxes, if it hadn't been that he was hale and sound, with hope in his eyes. Health and hope, at Herares

"Then little Daurillac ran up the gangway, laughing. I looked at him—everyone did—and wondered. And then, to cap the wonder, they two came up to me with their friendly, confident young faces, and asked for Henkel's house.

"'Turn to the left,' I said. And then I said, 'You'll excuse me, but what does Henkel want of you?'

"Scott didn't answer at first, but looked me over with his considering eyes, and I remembered a collarless shirt and a four days' beard. But Daurillac said, 'He wants butterflies of us, Monsieur. I am an entomologist, and my friend, he assists me.' He drew up very straight, but his eyes were laughing at himself. Then we exchanged names and shook hands, and I watched them going along the path to Henkel's

"Next day, Scott came down to the jetty. He sat on a stump and stared at everything. He was ready enough to talk, in his guarded way. Yes, he was new to the tropics; in some ways they were not what he had expected, but he was not disappointed. He was here for the novelty, the experience. But his friend, Louis Daurillac, had been in the Indies, and with some of Meyer's men in Burma, after orchids. Louis' father was a great naturalist, and Louis was very clever. Yes, Henkel had got hold of him through Meyer. He wanted someone to find this butterfly for him, this golden butterfly at the headwaters of the Mazzaron—someone whose name was yet in the making, someone he could get cheap So Louis had come. He was very keen on it. Henkel was to bear all costs, to supply food, ammunition, trade-goods, etc., and pay them according to the number of the new specimens that they found. 'So you see,' said Scott, with his clean smile, 'Louis and I can't lose by it.'

"We talked a bit more, and then young Scott said to me, suddenly, 'Henkel has everything ready, and we start in the morning. You seem to be the only white man about here. Come and see us off, will you?' I said yes; afterwards it struck me as curious that he should not have counted Henkel as a white man. He laughed, and apologised for the touch of sentiment. 'It's like plunging head first into a very deep sea,' he explained, 'and one likes to have someone on the shore. You'll be here when we come back?' And I said, 'Yes, either unloading on the jetty or in the new cemetery by the canal.' But he didn't smile. His light northern eyes were gravely considering this land, where life was held on a short lease, and he looked at me as if he were sorry for me.

"I saw them off the next day. There were six or eight men of Henkel's, loaded with food and trade-goods, and I saw that two of them were sickening where they stood. I looked in Daurillac's brilliant young face, and I hadn't the courage to say anything but 'Have you plenty of quinine?' He tapped a big tin case, and I nodded. 'And what are you taking the Indianos?' I asked.

"He fairly bubbled over with laughter. 'You would never guess, Monsieur, but we take clocks, little American clocks. The Indianos of the Mazzaron desire nothing but little clocks, they like the tick.'

"Their men had turned down one of the jungle paths. They shook hands with me, and Scott met my eyes with his grave smile. 'Just drawing breath for the plunge,' he said, with a glance at the forest beyond the last white roof. Daurillac slipped his arm through Scott's, and drew him after their slow-going *hombres*. At the bend of the path they turned and waved to me; Scott with a quick lift of the hand. But little Daurillac swept off his hat and stood half-turned for a minute; the sun splashed on his dark head, on his Frenchified belt and puttees, on his white breeches, and on an outrageous pink shirt Henkel seemed to have supplied him with. He looked suddenly brilliant and insubstantial, a light figure poised on the edge of the dark. One gets curious notions in Herares. The next moment they were gone. The jungle had shut down on them, swallowed them

up. They were instantly lost in it, as a bubble is lost in the sea.

"Two days before I hadn't known of their existence. But I was there to see them off, and I was there when Scott came back.

"It was well on into the rainy season, and I was down with fever. I was in my house, in my hammock, and the wind was swinging it. It was probably the hammock that did all the swinging, but I thought it was the house, and I had one foot on the floor to try and steady it. But it was no use. The walls lifted and sank all in one rush, like the side of a ship at sea. Outside I could see a pink roof, a white roof, a tin roof, and then the forest, with the opening of a path like the black mouth of a tunnel. I wanted to watch this tunnel, because I had an idea I'd seen something crawl along it a good while before. But I couldn't manage it; I had to shut my eyes. And then I felt the scratching on my boot . . .

"I caught hold of the sides of the hammock, but it was some time before I could manage to pull myself up. Then I looked down.

"A man was lying along on his face on the floor, just as he had crawled into my hut and fallen. The yellowed fingers of one hand clawed on my boot, and that was the only sign that he was alive. He lay quite quiet, except for the slow working of his fingers. And I sat quite quiet, staring down on him with the infinite leisure that follows a temperature of one hundred and five. It was only by slow degrees I realized that this was Derek Scott come back, and that he was probably dying.

"I got to my feet, and bent over him, but I couldn't raise him, of course. I was afraid he'd die before anyone came. So I took my revolver and aimed as well as I could at that tin roof beneath which my man Pedro was eating his dinner. The barrel went up and down with the walls of the hut, but I must have hit the roof, for the next thing I knew was a lot of smoke and noise, and Pedro's face, eyes and mouth open, rushing out of it. There seemed no interval before I found myself sitting in the hammock, and saying over and over again, 'But where's the little chap? Where's the little French chap?'

" Scott was still on the floor, but his head was on my man's shoulder, and Pedro was gently feeding him with sips of brandy and condensed milk. He turned and looked at me, and his eyes were clear and considering as ever, though his answer didn't sound quite sane. He said, 'The clocks wouldn't tick.'

" He said it as if it explained everything. Then he unstrapped a tin case from his belt, laid his head on it, and was instantly asleep.

" I cried out, 'Is it the fever, Pedro?' But my man said, 'No, Senor, it is the hunger.' He rolled Scott up very cleverly in a blanket. 'This Senor has had the fever, but it is not upon him now. Without doubt he is a little mad from being in the forest so long. But when he wakes he will be stronger.' So much I heard, and no more. Unconsciousness came down on me like a wave. But into the dark heart of that wave I carried the certainty that Pedro knew all about the matter and that he hated Henkel. How or why I was certain of this I don't know. But I was.

" I woke in the cool of the evening. The fresh breeze off the river was like the breath of life, and Pedro's face, thrust close to mine, no longer grew large and small by fits. I noticed that it was quite grey, and that his lips twitched as he muttered, 'Senor, Senor . . .'

" I said, 'Where is the Senor Scott?'

" 'He woke a little while ago and called for water to wash in and a clean coat, and he used the hair-brush. Then he went out—went out—'

" I got to my feet, threw an arm over Pedro's shoulder, and he ran with me out into the moonlit street. The track to the fountain lay like a ribbon of silver, the houses were like blocks of silver; and every house was shuttered and silent—breathless. Not a man lounged under the shade of the walls, not a girl went late to draw water, not a dog barked. The little place was deserted in the hold of the forest. It lay like a lonely raft of silver in the midst of a black sea. Only ahead of me a man stumbled slowly in the middle of the road, and his shadow staggered beside him. I have said there was no other living thing visible. Yet as this man stumbled past the shuttered houses, the very blades of grass, the very leaves on the

wall, seemed to have conscious life and to be aware of him. When the wind moved the trees, every branch seemed straining to follow him as Pedro and I followed.

"We followed, but we could not gain on him. It was like the dreams of fever. Pedro and I seemed to be struggling through the silence of Herares as if it were something heavy and resistant, and Scott reeled from side to side, but always kept the same distance ahead. We were still behind when we turned into Henkel's garden, and the scent of the flowers beat in our faces like heat. At the foot of the verandah steps we met the man who had admitted Scott.

"The man was running away. He was a cripple. He came down the steps doubled up, bundled past us, and was gone. Somewhere a door clashed open. There was no other sound. But in a moment the garden seemed full of stampeding servants, all maimed, or ill, or aged. They melted silently into the bushes as rats melt into brushwood, and they took no notice of us. I heard Pedro catch his breath quickly. But when a light flared up in one of the rooms, it showed no more than Scott talking with Henkel.

"They showed like moving pictures in a frame, and the frame was dark leaves about the window, which was open. I leaned against the side of it, and Pedro squatted at my feet, his head thrust forward as if he were at a cockfight. I did not know just why I was there. Henkel sat at a table, wagging his head backwards and forwards. Scott was sitting opposite him; and he looked as Lazarus might have looked when first he heard the Voice, and stirred . . .

"Henkel was saying, 'Dear me, dear me, but why should this have happened?' And Scott answered him as he had answered me, in that strange, patient voice,

" 'The clocks wouldn't tick.'

" 'But they were good clocks,' cried Henkel.

"Scott shook his head. 'No, they were not good clocks, he explained gently, 'they were too cheap. They would not go at all in the jungle. An Indian of the Mazzaron does not care what time his clock tells, but he likes it to tick. These were no good. And the food was not good. The things in the tins were bad when we opened them.'

“ ‘Mismanagement, mismanagement,’ said Henkel, but Scott went on as if he had not heard.

“ ‘We followed the river for two days and then turned east. In a week after that, two of your men were dead. They died of fever. No, the quinine was no good. There was a lot of flour in it. Two days more, and another man died, but he would have died anyhow. It was very hard to see them die and to be able to do nothing.

“ ‘The men who were left went so slowly that nearly all our food was gone when we reached the country of the Indios. We made our camp, and I shot a pig. That made us stronger, but Louis was very bad then with the fever.

“ ‘The Indios came down, and we spoke with their headmen. They thought we were mad, but the clocks pleased them. They sat round our tents and shook them to make them tick louder, until Louis cried out in his fever that all the world was a great clock that ticked. They gave us leave to hunt in their country for butterflies, and the headmen told off six to help us. One was very clever. He used to wear his net on his head with the stick hanging down behind, and he snared the butterflies with a loop of grass, as if they had been birds.

“ ‘Our tents were of cheap cotton stuff that would not keep the rain out, and the wet came in on Louis and made him worse. But he was young, and I saw to it that he had food, and your men loved him. I do not think he would have died if the clocks had ticked properly.’

“ ‘I do not understand,’ said Henkel, blinking his heavy brown eyes.

“ ‘No? They were so cheap that they broke at the first winding. The Indios brought them back, and asked for better ones. I had no better ones.’

“ ‘Still, I do not understand,’ said Henkel, smoothly, and blinked in the lamplight.

“ ‘Scott’s tired voice went on. ‘The Indios were very angry. They brought us no more butterflies and no more food. And presently, as we went about the camp, or the paths of the forest, the little arrows began to fall in front of us and behind, though we never saw who shot at us.’

“ ‘ The little arrows ? ’ asked Henkel, heavily. ‘ I do not understand. Go on.’

“ ‘ There is very little to tell. Only a nightmare of hunger, of wet, of fever, of silence, and the little poisoned arrows quivering everywhere And one day a little dart flickered through a rent in the rotten cotton tenting and struck Louis. He died in five minutes. Then I and the men who were left broke through and came down to the Mazzaron. The Indios followed us, and I am the only one left. It is a pity the clocks wouldn’t tick, Mister Henkel.’

“ ‘ Ya, ya,’ said Henkel, leaning over the table, ‘ but the butterfly ? The golden butterfly ? You have found it ?’

“ Scott opened the tin case slowly and clumsily, drew out the perfect insect, and laid it on the table. But it is wrong to speak of that wide-winged loveliness as an insect. Henkel sat staring at its glittering and transparent gold, one big yellowish hand curved on either side of it, too happy to speak. His lips moved, and I fancied he was saying to himself, ‘ Cheap, cheap’

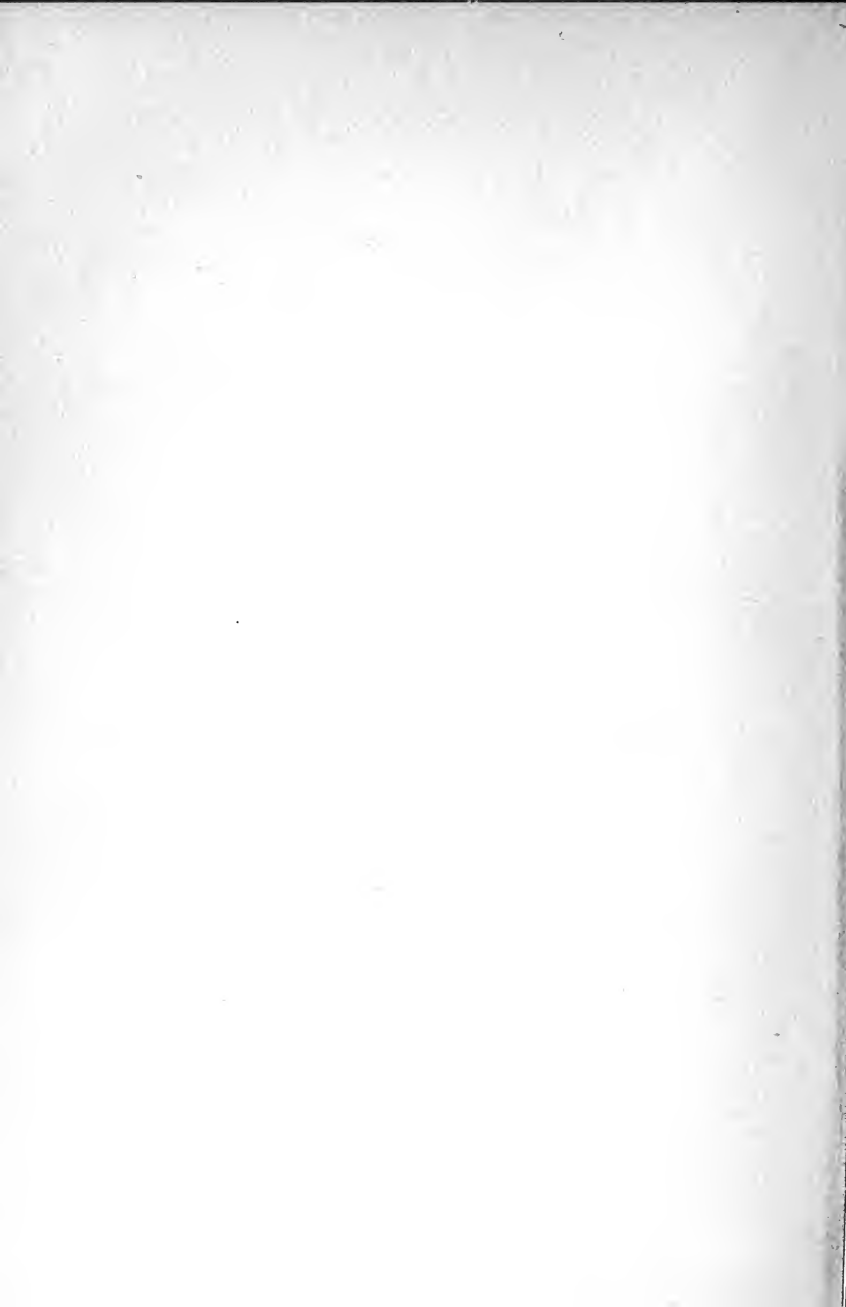
“ ‘ It is very good,’ he said at last, cunningly, ‘ but I am sorry there is only one. I do not know that it is worth very much. But now I will pay you as I promised. There was no agreement that you should receive the other young man’s share, and there is only one specimen. But I will pay you.’

“ Scott was fumbling in his belt. ‘ Yes,’ he said, ‘ you will pay me,’ and he leaned forward with something in his hand. We saw Henkel’s face turn to yellow wax, and he tried to stand up, but he was too stout to lift himself quickly. He had no time to turn before Scott shot him through the heart.

“ When I broke through the vines, Scott was moving the butterfly out of the way He looked up at me with his old considering look, his old clean smile. ‘ It was cheap at the price,’ he said, touching one golden wing with his finger.”



STORIES



STORIES

JOYCE was at his tenth story, the pipes were drawing well, and the birch logs singing softly, while Father John gazed at his entertainers with fascinated eyes.

" And so he fell into the car, and the grain poured in on him, and there he was, buried. That car wasn't unloaded until spring, and then out he came like a board, and they buried him again, and no one knew he was heir to a million."

Father John made a stunned, murmuring noise, and his hosts looked upon him fondly. Only Morris was discontented.

"I thought he'd have come out alive."

"Alive?"

"Yes. Fed on the grain"

Royce turned his back on Morris, and Falconer began, hastily.

"But that's not so queer as the man at Fort Duchesne. He was a scientific fellow, and he went mad, and ran after the shooting stars with a butterfly net. It was in the Fall, when the sky is generally fizzling with meteors. This fellow would run after them till he fell, exhausted, and they had to tell off a Siwash to retrieve him, which must have been very annoying. He's in a private asylum in 'Frisco now, keeping copper-filings in a cage; thinks they're larvæ and feeds them on lettuce leaves."

"Poor soul, poor soul," murmured Father John, helplessly, and for a few minutes there was silence.

"But that's nothing to what happened to Ignatius O'Higgins up north." Connor's voice rolled as richly into the flat silence as a plum pudding on a table. "Out snaring rabbuts, he was, and put his foot in a bear trap. A while after, another trapper came by, and he wondering why the snow was all trod up with rabbit tracks, and they marching

in squads like Ulstermen, bad luck to 'em. And then he went on a bit, and he knew ; and the knowledge he had of the black, bitter heart of a rabbut gave him a turn, and he was a better Christian all his days, Father. All the buck-rabbuts east of the Rockies, fighting and kicking and struggling round that bear trap

"Have another drink, Con," said someone loudly, passing up the decanter. Connor helped himself, and drank, beaming, to the guest of the evening. "Here's good luck and a fat living to you, Father Jack, and may you never want a bottle of the best to share with a friend."

"A memorable night," said Father John, looking very young and pink in the depths of his leather chair. "That's what it's been—a memorable night. It was very kind of you to ask me again, to take me in once more among you, to give me a share in this way of all the things you've seen and done and heard in all these years. And such things It's a terrible world," and he shuddered, slightly.

"Bless your heart," said Royce, "but lots of queer things must have come your way since you took to—this," and he leaned forward, and gently touched the shabby, black sleeve.

Father John looked at his cassock with some discontent. "Old women's quarrels, and young folks' love affairs, a mother to be comforted, or an old man ushered into Paradise. It's God's work," finished Father John, wistfully, "but there's no good denying it's a bit dull."

"The confessional?" suggested Royce, delicately.

Father John leaned forward, with a twinkle. "Shall I tell you? Well, it's my belief all the bad, wild deeds are done by the Protestants, I hear so few of them."

"But life and death—you must come closer to these than any of us. They're not dull."

"In the aggregate I find them so."

"But surely, sometimes?"

"Well, I don't know." Father John brightened up a little. "There is something under my notice now. Not through the confessional, of course ; it's open, quite open. And it's—well, curious. Yes," he went on, judicially, "I should certainly call it curious."

"Is it war, passion or revenge?" asked Royce, with a smile.

"Well,"—Father John did not smile,—"it is probably murder."

"Probably murder? Don't you know, then?"

"No. That's the curious part of it. I don't know, and the man who most likely did it, he doesn't know."

"O, come now, Father Jack"

"It's a fact. He'd tell me if he knew, but he doesn't."

"Do you mean to tell us that a fellow could murder, not kill, murder—another fellow, and not know it?"

"Yes, I do," said Father John, mildly, "that is just M'Cabe's case."

"Go on with his case," said Connor, admiringly.

"Well, I only know it in bits, you understand—in flashes as he tells it to me—a flash of light so clear and vivid it's painful, and then fog and darkness. I'm afraid it's a pretty bad case, though I've grown fond of M'Cabe. It's curious, too," mused Father John, "how fond you do get of anyone or anything that looks to you for help. I ought to detest M'Cabe, he's always sending one of his brats to call me up at night—thinking he's going to remember"

"What was M'Cabe in his off hours?" asked Morris, with envy.

"M'Cabe? O, I'm afraid he was a seal-poacher. He tells me of fights with Japanese ships in the fog—bloody decks, and half-seen yellow faces. It's all in a fog as he tells it—the ships and the men, the seals in the sea and the bull-walrus bellowing from the floes. I wish he could make it clearer to me, but he's always down on the floor, groaning—afraid he's going to remember.

"He must have seen some queer things, if you like, where Asia and America are still in the making, and no man can read the tides, and on the islands in the summer you walk waist-deep in flowers. M'Cabe says he's gone ashore on one of these islands and picked harebells and fern till his arms could hold no more. And the next year the island's gone, swallowed in the sea, and a new volcano spouting east-by-north in the offing. They're very troublesome, those islands. And the natives are as strange as their own

coasts; you see them, M'Cabe says, in their high-prowed boats, driving down the steel-grey channels, past the long promontories, out of the fog and into the fog again. They used to massacre the fur traders, and no one seems to know what they do now. They just go past, flying low, like birds, and the crews throw things at them

"Well, from what M'Cabe says, it wasn't natives, but islands, that gave him his trouble. They seem to have been sailing very slowly up some coast in a fog, which lay thick on the sea like a layer of wool, but cleared so suddenly that the topsails were in golden day. On deck they could see nothing. They had a man at the top of the foremast, I think he said, and that man was absolutely cut off from them by the fog. They heard his voice as a voice from another world.

"They were just creeping along, only the topsails drawing. M'Cabe and another man were up in the bows, looking over the side. He says the sea came sliding out of the fog and curling alongside, pretty little gentle waves, as white as lambs. M'Cabe watched them for some time, he says, and then was going aft, when he heard the other man say, 'Come back and look at this.' He went and looked, and there were all the waves breaking black.

"Quite black, he says, like soot instead of foam. And then, as they stared, the fog grew pit-black ahead of them, as if a great mouth had opened. And it was all perfectly sudden and perfectly silent. They could see nothing, they could hear nothing, except that once the look-out man screamed. Then they looked up, out of their pit of fog . . .

"It was like a signal breaking out, M'Cabe says. I do not quite know what he means, but over the golden sky something deadly—smoke, ash, gas—was rushing and spreading. I can't make out from him whether it looked red or black; but it was dark, and hot.

"Then they felt the sea tremble, and that blind ship fouled in fog was struck. Not tossed or struck by a wave, but by something that hit at her out of the fog. They'd all run aft like sheep, away from the blackness. And the next thing that M'Cabe knows is that he was in a small boat which had been trailing astern, alone with another man,

drifting in the fog. The ship was gone as if that blow had smacked her out of existence—gone for ever. It is very curious how Time seemed to go wrong. The destruction or disappearance of the ship, in M'Cabe's mind, happened instantaneously; as a matter of fact, it must have taken some moments, for the other man had had time to run and fetch a fur coat of which he was very proud. I know nothing of this man, except that he was, and that he had a fur coat; he was the first thing M'Cabe noticed with a clear mind, brushing his coat with black hands. They were as black as sweep's, the boat was black, a black sea lopped after them oilily, and the fog rained black on them. 'Is it snowing black?' asked M'Cabe. And the other man, never looking up from the coat, grunted, 'Nah, it's ashes. There's been an island blowed up, or something, and it'll ruin my coat.'

"M'Cabe says he took a dislike to him and his coat, though he'd liked him well enough before; he was that unfriendly over it. Those are M'Cabe's words—'that unfriendly.'

"M'Cabe took the oars that were in the boat and paddled about in the fog to see if he could find the ship. He seems to have been a good deal shaken. He says he doesn't remember anything else until the boat grated softly on a gravel beach and a great rush and screaming went past his head in the fog, and things black as bats which he took at first for devils, but they were only sooty gulls.

"They pulled the boat up and sat down on the beach waiting for the fog to lift, but it didn't. It didn't lift for days; the blackness went out of it and it grew lighter, but as thick, M'Cabe says, as milk. And all the time they had to stay on this little bit of an island, a few flat rocks and a little gravel huddled together in the sea. It was spring, the rocks were all glassy with ice every morning; but the gulls were laying about the beach tamer than poultry, and they gathered the rank eggs and ate them, and drank of the half-frozen sleet pools. Fire? They had nothing to burn but the seats of the boat; they tried to kindle these with their few matches, but the sea-soaked wood refused to catch, however fine they shaved it. They turned the boat over and dug little burrows in the sand to sleep in, lining them with dried weed. But it must have been cold beyond bearing. M'Cabe says he used

to crawl out of his burrow in the morning, almost crying with cold. And the other man snoozing comfortably in the fur coat. I asked him why they didn't sleep in one burrow and share the coat ; he said he didn't like to, the other man being ' that unfriendly.'

" M'Cabe doesn't know how long they were on the island. He says it was all fog, and sea-beasts bellowing, and great birds buffeting them, and cold ; there was the other man, too, very careful not to tear his fur coat on the rocks. At last, M'Cabe says, what with the fog and the cold and the birds, he became so that he could not take his mind off that fur coat.

" He'd lie shaking in his burrow at night, thinking how warm he'd be with it on. He'd limp about the island by day, thinking what it would feel like if he could put his hands in the pockets. He'd cry, that great bull-headed raw-boned scamp, because the other man wouldn't lend it to him. He would have blanks, gaps of thought or consciousness, when he didn't know where he was or what he was doing. And he'd come out of them to find himself following the other man about and staring at the coat.

" I think the other man was frightened. M'Cabe has shown him to me—just a glimpse—stout, bearded, with pale eyes, running round and round the island. M'Cabe thinks he must have chased him ; he'd come out of his blank fits to fear the man would fall in and get the coat wet. ' And how to dry it then,' said M'Cabe, ' I didn't see.' The other man never left off the coat ; he clung to those mangy old fox-skins literally as you'd cling to life. You see him always, furred to his pale eyes, running clumsily among a white flutter of birds, and M'Cabe pursuing him, a man in a dream—a dream of warmth.

...
" He came out of this dream one day to find himself knee-deep in surf, the day blown clear as grey glass, and a whaler's boat putting in to the island. He splashed to meet it, and a man hauled him aboard by the collar. M'Cabe's very confused about this. He says they were very kind to him and fed him with rum with biscuit crumbs in it. They said, ' Are there any more on ye ? ' And he said ' Yes ; ' so they hunted every creek on the island, and thought he was dreaming till

they found the two burrows under the boat. It wasn't any use looking any longer ; there was the island, bare as a child's slate flung on the sea, and nothing near it but the gulls. So they tied the boat on astern and went. ' This pore feller's the only one saved,' says someone, and someone else says, ' Yes, and he wouldn't have lasted long without he was kept warm. He's pretty far gone as it is.' With that, M'Cabe says, in a wild way, ' It's the other man who's saved, and pore Bill M'Cabe, he's a-lying froze on the island,' and falls forward in a faint. Because, you see, looking down at himself, he'd seen he was all wrapped up in that old fox-fur coat.

" For some days after he'd come to aboard the whaler, he doesn't seem to have done much or thought of much ; he just lay in his bunk and shivered. They were very good to him ; gave him blankets and the best food they had, and let him lie, for his mind was all in a fog. They spread the fur coat atop of the blankets, and whenever he'd lift his head or stretch his hand, there it would be. It didn't worry him much at first, but as his strength came back, the fog in his brain lifted, all but a few patches. And he'd lie fingering the greasy fur, and wonder—and wonder—how it came there

" I've known men, bolder or weaker than M'Cabe, who'd have let those patches rest. But he couldn't. He kept trying to blow the fog clear. He'd lie there, shaking under the fur coat, and fighting for memory till he was as weak as a rag, and the cook, who was especially good to him, would bring him a tin of bitter brown coffee and a hot stove-lid for his feet. . . . Those blank patches in his mind were like lead, like iron ; he might wreck himself against them like a prisoner against a stone wall ; his own brain, his own memory, would yield him nothing.

" How did he get the fur coat ? What he struggled for was the complete picture ; and in the centre, it was smeared with a great black brush. He could not remember.

" He saw himself and the other man in the boat, landing on the island, digging their burrows in the icy sand ; saw again all the monotony of that suffering ; saw them gathering eggs, whirling arms like windmills in the fog as they fought the great gulls. He could taste again the salty frost on his lips. He could see the other man running round the

icy rocks, and a shadow of himself following anxiously. He could see the rime on the fur coat, the pockets bulging with eggs, a button that was loose and worried him for fear it would be lost. And he could see himself being hauled into the boat by the collar of that coat. But between these two—blackness.

"How did he get it? What did he do?"

"Did the other man die? They didn't find him. Did he take off the coat, leave it behind him, and fall from the rocks while scrambling for eggs? Did M'Cabe push him off? Did he kill him first and then take off the coat and throw the body into the sea? 'He didn't feel his end near and will the coat to me,' says M'Cabe, 'he'd have wished to be buried with it on, he was that jealous of it.' Many and many a time I've sat there with him and gone over every inch of that dirty old coat, hunting for a cut, a tear, a stain that might help him to remember, and he in a sweat of fear. 'Father, it'll come in another minute,' he'd say, 'in a minute I'll know.' But he never knew, he doesn't know. The fog never lifted. The man in the fur coat running round the rocks in the mist—himself being hauled into the boat by the collar of that coat: whatever lay between of accident, of murder, of death—whatever lay between, is locked in the mysterious archives of the brain, like a book, the covers of which he may never be permitted to open. He goes about his world, as it were, looking at his hands; and he does not know if they are clean, or if there is on them—blood."

Father John sat silent, staring at the fire, and his hosts were silent also; until at last Royce rose leisurely, opened a drawer, and took therefrom a bundle of cheroots. "I think you are all agreed," he said, "as to whom these belong?"

A chorus of assent and admiration rose on the words, and Royce leaned over and clapped Father John on the shoulder. "I didn't know you had it in you, Padre," he said.

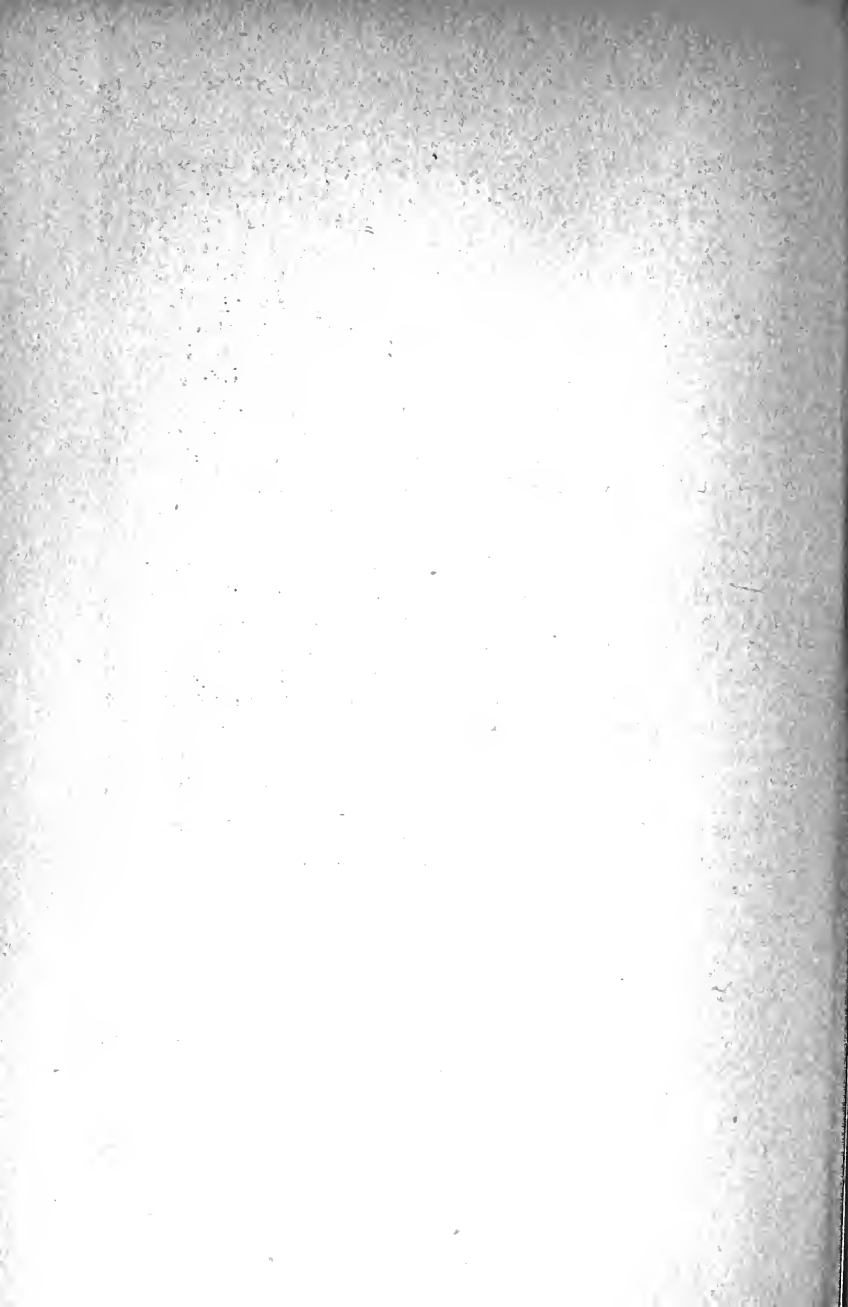
"But your mechanism was a little too apparent," said Morris jealously, "and I know where you got your setting from. It's in here—" He turned and groped in the book-case.

"When I went fishing with you a few score years ago," put in Connor, "we'd limit the righteous increase to fifty per cent. I'd like to know how much ye tacked on to that fur coat. How many perch do ye reckon to a salmon now? Far as we go, boys," he said, looking sadly at the cheroots, "ye can trust Holy Church to go one further. And I thought Jack that innocent, I tried me rabbuts on him."

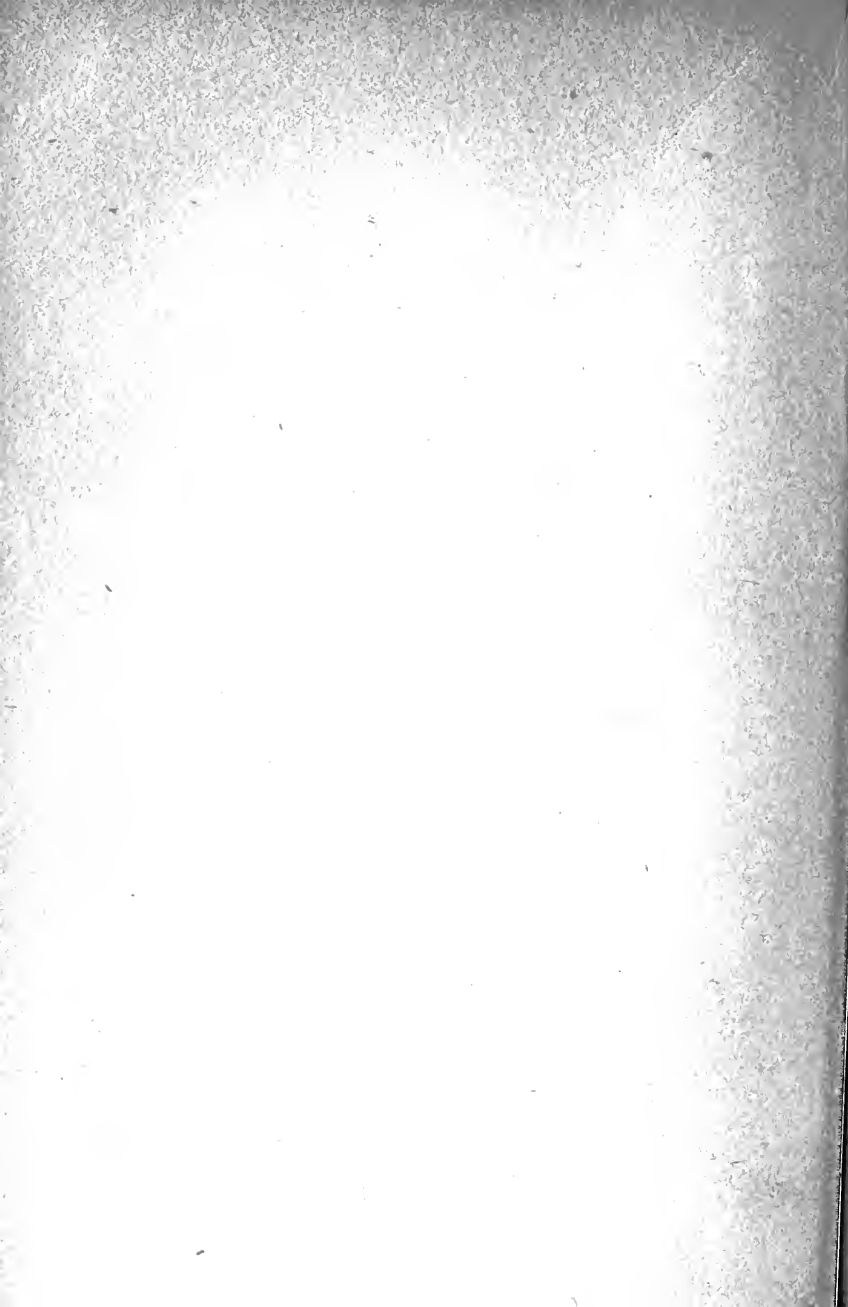
Royce grinned into Father John's entirely bewildered face. "I don't want to know the percentage. I've enjoyed a good yarn so well told that it took me in at first until you made it a little bit too effective. A bundle of these," he went on, flourishing the cheroots, "always goes to the most successful liar of the evening. And I don't think," he finished gracefully, "that we've any of us a doubt as to who that is to-night . . ."

A noise at the door made him turn—made Father John pause with his mouth open and his hand outstretched in denial or acceptance. They heard the servant's voice raised indignantly, and a short scuffle in the hall. Then the door opened and a girl ran into the room; a rough girl from the river front, with a shawl over her shoulders and the rain lying like a net of pearls on her solid flaxen hair. She ran to the priest like a dog, and caught his cassock with her square tanned hands, and began to wail, strangely, softly.

"Father, Father," she besought him, "come to M'Cabe. O, come quick to poor M' Cabe. He's remembered. . . ."



THE STOVE



THE STOVE

"I'LL be back the third day at latest with the doctor. I've left you wood enough for three days and more and you've grub for a month." Garth looked at her anxiously; his strong mouth twitched. Suddenly he leaned forward and brushed her cheek lightly with his yellow beard. "I—hate to leave you, little girl," he said, with a gentleness not common with him, "but I guess it's Derek's only chance."

"Of course you must go. It's Derek's only chance." Dorette faced him steadily. She was pale, slight, sleepy-eyed, but wilderness born and bred, for all that; one guessed a spirit of steel in that fragile sheath. She finished wistfully: "There'll be nothing for me to do—nothing, but—wait."

"Only look after yourself and keep the stove up."

"I'll do it. And you—if you meet Maxime . . ."

Rage blazed suddenly in her brother's eyes. The barrel of his rifle gleamed blue as he gripped it. "If I meet Maxime," he said, through his teeth, "it's a finish for him or for me!"

He turned about without another word, and swung down the forest trail on his long run to Mandore.

Dorette watched him until he was no more than a dark shadow among the heavy blue shades that hung from spruce to spruce like tangible banners. All life, all sound, all motion seemed to go with him. Mile after mile, she knew, on each side of her was nothing but the same silence, the same stillness, league after league of the desolate fir forest of the North. She went into the cabin and bolted and barred the door behind her, as if the solitude were an enemy which she must keep out.

The cabin was a pleasant place. The walls were sheathed in red cedar, and there were fur rugs on the floor, red curtains

at the windows. In the centre of the larger of the two rooms into which the cabin was divided stood the great iron stove, in winter the source of their very life.

Its voice filled the cabin with a roar like the forever unsatisfied roaring of the wind and sea—a hungry voice. Dorette swung open the heavy door, wincing from the furnace-glory within, as she flung on more wood. That was her one occupation until Garth came back—feeding the stove.

She went to one of the bunks—like the bunks of a ship—that were built on the wall behind the stove, and looked in.

Derek, her younger brother, lay there without sense or motion, as he had lain ever since the sergeant of police and Garth had carried him in and laid him there. He drowsed between life and death, shot through the body. Now and then he swallowed a little broth, but with no knowledge of the hand that fed him. She dared not touch him. There was nothing she could do for him but keep the cabin warm enough to sustain that flickering lamp of life till the doctor came, for the cold of that country kills like a sword.

Suddenly, clinging to the side of the bunk, she trembled. "If only you could speak to me, Derek," she whispered. "If only I could hear your voice!"

But the only voice was the voice of the great stove.

Her mind painted for her the scene she had not witnessed—the hard men of the mines and the lumber camps, still men with formidable eyes, following Cain's trail from Fort Dismay to Anisette; the end of the trail at a little lonely shack blinded in snow, ringed with watchful men; Derek pleading that Maxime might have "one more chance, boys;" the parley at the door, the shot coming from nowhere; men storming into the shack over Derek's fallen body, and finding it empty; Maxime Dufour escaped again! She saw it all. Heard again Garth's voice in hard-breathed sentences between shut teeth: "But he's not goin' to get away again. He'll have to get food and shelter somewhere; and if it's a thousand miles away, we'll follow and shoot him down like the wolf he is!"

She glanced round, pale and shaken, thinking that still she heard that deep voice of bitter rage. But it was only the undertone of the roaring stove humming its angry song.

She busied herself about such duties as she could find. Twice she fed the stove from the pile of wood on the floor beside it. The fierce heat licked out at her each time, just as a savage beast will strike through the bars of his cage, and each time she shut the door with the sense of imprisoning some lion-voiced living thing.

Her work was soon done. Everything in the cabin was tidied and tidied again. She glanced at the clock. Only an hour of the slow time had gone. Garth had only been gone an hour. She turned the clock with its face to the wall, took out a shirt she was making for Garth—red-and-black checked flannel, thick as felt—and stitched resolutely.

Her hearing, accustomed to the sound of the stove, as the ear adjusts itself to the thunder of a waterfall, was acute to catch the faintest noises. She heard the tiny sound of the thread passing through the flannel, the soft thud of snow slipping from the boughs of the forest, the least check and stumble in Derek's shallow breathing. Each time she heard this last, her own heart checked and stumbled in tune with it. She held her own breath till her brother's renewed its weak rhythm.

So the morning passed. In the afternoon, she found a snowshoe that needed re-stringing. Deftly as Montagnais she twisted the gut and wove the net.

It was dark sooner than she could have hoped. She needed no lamp. The stove filled the cabin with its glow. In the dark it became a beautiful and formidable thing, a shape of dull red, with a heart of lambent rose. She glanced at the little windows, sheathed thick with frost-ferns. It would be a cold night. Her thoughts went to Garth, then, with dread, to Maxime Dufour. She dragged her cot from the inner room, set it across the front of the stove, and lay down. The warmth was like a hand pressing on her eyelids.

With the subconscious watchfulness of those who care for the beloved, she was awake five times in the long night to feed the stove. Each time she looked at Derek, and thought, with a pang, that he was deeper sunken among the pillows. His eyes were not quite closed; the silvery line of eyeball reflected the red glow. She would have liked to close them, but her hand shrank from so prophetic an action.

The last time she woke the sun had risen. The gathered crystals on the windows were lit with a glow that paled the stove. Dorette went into the inner room and braided her hair.

That day passed as the first had done. Her brother was weaker. She pleaded with him, passionately tender. "Just a mouthful of soup, Derry. Wake up, Derry dear. Take it for my sake, Derry!" but her voice, which had dimly roused him the day before, could not reach him now. She looked round for something she might do for him.

The diminished heap of logs on the floor showed her work enough. She must bring in a fresh supply from the pile behind the cabin. She ate a hasty breakfast and made herself some coffee. Then, hooded and wrapped against the cold, she opened the door.

She stepped into a world of white, blue, and black; solid, translucent, and motionless as though built from gems. Where the blue sky touched the black trees there seemed to run a setting of gold; where the black trees trailed branches to the snow, was a stain of sapphire shadow. It was fiercely cold. She shut the door behind her, hastily, ran to the snow-buried wood pile behind the cabin, burdened herself with an armful of small logs, returned, set her load on the threshold, opened the door, and tumbled the wood on the floor. All the morning she worked thus. Her spirits rose; she began to believe that Derek would not die, and soon she might think of Garth's return. The noise of the logs as she flung them on the floor pleased her. It was a change from the one unceasing voice that filled the cabin day and night—the voice of the stove.

The second night she was restless. She dared not sleep at first, for fear she should sleep too well. Wind came up with the electric stars; the great stove sang to a higher, more tremendous note; she could scarcely keep pace with its consuming hunger. The pine knots and bright birch logs fell to ash in a moment. If she slept, she dreamed that the stove was out, and the cold creeping into the cabin in long feathers of frost, that twisted under the door like snakes, until one touched her on the throat and she woke, choking.

Dawn found the sky fleeced with cloud, the cabin warm, and the hurt man yet alive.

Again with the day her heart lightened. Four—five hours from that time, and she might expect Garth with the doctor from the mines at Mandore. She wound the clock, and turned it with its chipped white face to the room, no longer dreading to tell the passage of the hours.

Yet five hours went, and Garth had not come.

She went to the door. Closing it behind her that the cold might not get into the cabin even for a moment, she stared down the trail. It ran in the straight no more than a half-mile; farther than that, she could not see. Yet it was less her eyes than her soul that she thus strained to see beyond the forest.

“Garth! Garth! Garth!”

Who had given that wild cry that rang among the trees? For a moment she wondered, then knew it had come from her own troubled heart.

She must see beyond the first bend of the trail; she must see if, farther than that, the blue-white ribbon between the trees was still empty of her hope.

She built up the fire again, put on coat and hood and snow-shoes, took one glance at Derek, and left the cabin. She sped down the trail. She was panting when she reached the first curve. Almost afraid to look, she saw the long track before her—empty. There was something conscious and deliberate in that emptiness, as if the forest knowingly withheld from her a secret. She dared go no farther. She turned back and fled home.

The clock ticked off another hour—two, three, four. Garth had not come.

Darkness, and he had not come.

Loneliness and suspense were shaking her strong, young nerves. The worst of all was the silence. The voice of the stove became first an annoyance, then a weariness, then an intolerable burden. The voice of its devouring hunger was the very voice of silence, of desolation. She flung the wood in angrily. “If there was only someone to *speak* to,” she said, a little wildly—“just someone to give me a word!”

There was no one—then, nor through the endless night,

when she feared to sleep, lest, in her dreams, or in reality, that insatiable thing in the stove that kept them alive might escape her, nor with the stormy dawn. Garth did not come.

There was no wood left in the house. Before she did anything else, she wrapped herself and went to the wood-pile.

The wood-pile was heaped against the back of the cabin : it was roofed and sheeted with snow. She pulled at the butt of a log, and the wood came down with a run, mixed with much snow—such dry snow that the wood was not moistened until she held it in her warm hand. The bitter work was a relief to her. She thrust the soft, dark hair out of her eyes and piled herself such a load that she swayed under it. "But it's something to do for Derek," she said, wistfully. "It's all I can do."

She took in enough for the day. But there was the night.

"Garth will be back by then," she muttered, with cold lips, staring at the stove.

"Garth *must* be back by then." The stove sent a screaming rush of flame up the pipe, as if in mockery. She felt an unreasoning hatred for it, as she went wearily out again to gather enough wood for the night too.

Kneeling beside the wood-pile, she groped with numbed hands. She felt nothing but snow.

She thrust in her arm to the shoulder. She met no resistance but that of the snow.

Her heart beat in shuddering throbs. She brought a long pole and prodded the pile, then swung the pole and levelled it. She found nothing but snow.

"How did it happen?" She heard herself asking this over and over. Easily enough. She or Garth or Derek had been drawing supplies from the other side of the pile, and the snow had slipped from the roof and filled the spaces; hardening, it had stretched a roof over emptiness. The pile, which had been taken for good, hardwood logs, fodder for that roaring hungry heat within, was no more than a heap of snow.

Dorette turned slowly, and went into the cabin.

She stood by Derek's bunk, staring at the wood on the floor. It was enough for the day, but what of the night?

Would Garth return before the night ?

She looked about the cabin. There were things there, things that would burn. Her sleepy brown eyes widened. There was war in them as she leaned and kissed Derek's cheek. He did not stir from that deepening sleep of his.

"Sleep on, Derry," she whispered, scarcely knowing what she said, "sleep well, Derry. I'll take care of you, I'll fight for you !"

She took Garth's heavy axe, and began on the chairs.

They were heavy and clumsy things, Garth's pride, since he had made them himself. They would feed the stove well ; but they were hard for a girl's arm to chop, even though she struck true as a woodman, and Dorette's hands were scorched from the door of the stove. As she toiled, her eyes ranged the cabin, calculating on this box, that shelf, the table. Her heart beat to every sound. As the wind rose higher, the bitter day was full of sounds. A dozen times she ran to the door, crying, "Garth !" A dozen times she saw nothing but the forest and a driven mist of snow, as fine and dry as dust.

By the earliest dusk she had chopped up everything in the cabin. Each stroke sent a jar of pain to her shoulder from her burned and bruised hands, but she did not feel it. And still the stove roared, insatiable. The dried wood of their furnishings, pine for the most part, burned like straw. The great iron horror must be fed, and she had nothing to feed it.

She took the axe and went out.

The grey forest fronted her in a rustling drive of snow and shadow. There must be a hundred fallen boughs within range of the cabin. She found one, dragged it from the snow, and toiled with it into the house. She twisted it apart, desperately, and there was blood on the rough, broken stuff she thrust into the stove.

She went out again. She was growing more desperate as her strength failed. There was a great branch trailing from a spruce, and she tore and wrenched at it, but it would not yield—it was frozen. She swung her weight upon it, sobbing. She struck with all the force remaining in her, but the axe-blade turned in her weary hands. She felt as though the will in her, passionately strong, should sever the bough as by

steel. She did not know she was beaten, until she slipped weakly and fell in the snow and lay there, wailing helplessly and softly as a child.

The bitter snow stung her face like heat—like the heat of the stove. If she stayed there, the stove would be out. She lifted herself to her knees, and saw in the growing dark a man, who stood with a rifle on his arm, looking down at her.

“Garth! Oh, Garth!”

But even as the cry left her lips, she knew it was not Garth.

A figure, lithe even under the heavy furs, a face hidden in the cowl he had drawn forward above his fur cap, a certain strange immobility that vaguely chilled her, but surely—help? So swift is thought, that in the transitory seconds before she spoke again her brain had shown her a picture, a memory of a wild-cat which she and Garth had vainly tried to corner in the yard—of the creature’s utter immobility until it launched itself and struck.

“The stove! Oh, the stove!”

She thought, as her hands went out to that motionless figure in the shadows, that she had spoken all the desperate appeal that was in her heart. But she only repeated, “Oh, the stove, the stove!”

“What stove?”

“The stove. The stove in our cabin. There’s—no more wood for it!”

She waited. Surely he understood. But he remained as he was, motionless, staring down at her.

She looked up at him with a burning appeal. She had forgotten to rise from her knees. She kneeled at his feet in the snow. Her breath came in gasps. “There,” she repeated, helplessly, “there—in the cabin—the stove! It’s going out!”

Still he waited.

“There’s a sick man there—my brother! Oh!” she finished, as he did not stir, “help me, if you’re a man!”

“Oh, b’gosh, yes, I’m a man!” She fancied that he was laughing in the shadow of the cowl. “But why should I help you?”

She had no more words. Silently she lifted and held out to him her bleeding hands.

After a long minute he stirred slowly. Without a word he laid his gun crosswise on two fir branches that grew above her reach, easily within his own. He lifted the axe from the snow. She watched him. Four sharp cross-cuts, and the trailing branch fell. He set his foot on it, chopped it quickly into four or five pieces. As each piece rolled free, Dorette snatched it as a starving woman might snatch bread.

"That enough?"

Staggering under her load, she stared at him. "No, no!" she stammered. "It's not enough for the night. For the pity of Heaven, cut me some more!"

She turned away and hurried towards the cabin. Half-way there he overtook her. Without a word he lifted the logs from her arms into his own. She was too spent to thank him. Dumbly she moved at his side, conscious only that strength was here, help was here, that she might yet save Derek.

Entering the cabin, there was no glow, no light at all. With a low sound, Dorette swung open the door of the stove. Nothing was there but a handful of red ash ringed with grey.

With trembling hands she gathered a few splinters and thrust them in; she crouched before the gaunt, iron thing, as though she would hold it in her arms and warm it in her bosom. But the man, who had followed her, thrust her aside curtly enough. She watched him as he shaved a stick into delicate ribbons of wood—watched him as he coaxed them into flame. He tickled the appetite of the sullen, devouring thing in the stove with scraps of resinous bark and little twigs. Presently the fire laid hold on the larger logs, and fed upon them, hissing. He shut the door then, and turned to her.

She had lighted a lamp, and in the light stood looking at him, softly bright. Her eyes were stars of gratitude. She said at once: "My brother's still living."

She gestured towards the bunk. His eyes did not follow the gesture, or move from her pale face, as he said, abruptly: "You stay here with him. I'm goin' to get you in some more wood."

Her eyes flashed suddenly with tears. She said, brokenly:

"You're *good*. Oh, you're a good man! While you're—cuttin' the wood, I'll—thank God you came!"

He went out into the night without answering her.

He returned in half an hour, loaded mightily. Sitting on the end of her cot, she smiled at him, falteringly. She had been weeping.

He did not speak to her. Light-footed as a cat, he busied himself about the humming stove, then went forth again.

When he came back the second time, she was asleep.

Her face—very pale, very pure, fragile for one of her life and race—was rosed in the glow of the stove. Her hurt hands were curled within one another, like the hands of a child. Moving in his noiseless way, the man went again, and looked down at her.

His furred cowl had fallen back. His face also caught the light of the stove. Dark, keen, predatory, it was the face less of a man than of some embodied passion of hate or revenge, the face of an Ishmael, the face of Cain. It looked strange now, so little was it shaped or accustomed to the gentleness of expression it momentarily wore, as a breath blurs the gleam of steel. Light and silent as all his movements were, they showed no gentleness. But he seemed gentle when he lifted the end of one of Dorette's dark plaits, which had fallen to the soiled floor, and laid it on the cot beside her just because he hesitated and was clumsy.

The plait of dark, silken hair was warm; his hand lingered over it. He leaned above her, and her breath was warm. That strangely unmoving regard of his was on her face. As if it had called her from her dreams, she woke, and lifted to him the clear eyes of a child. "I—did thank God—you came," she whispered, with a child's simplicity. Sleep held her again, almost before she had finished speaking.

The young man drew back, noiselessly lifted the axe, and once more went out.

Sinewy, silent, untiring, he toiled for her all night. And all night she slept.

She had slipped into unconsciousness as a child does, worn out with anxiety and fatigue. She woke a woman, and flushed to her hair, as she realized what she had done.

The man who had helped and guarded her all night, was

standing in the doorway. The door was open ; there was a frosty freshness in the air, which the roaring stove raised to the warmth of summer. The world outside was a dazzle of sun ; silver drops rattled from the eaves ; a crow called in the forest. It was the first sun of spring, the year's change. In Dorette's heart was a change also, a quickening, a birth of something new and unknown, that almost brought tears to her eyes. For the first time in her hard life she had rested on another's strength ; unconsciously she had found it sweet. That simple heart was in her look as she went to the stranger. She said, softly, " I did not mean to sleep. Why did you let me ? "

He said, almost roughly : " You were all tired out. "

The tears brimmed over. She did not know if pain or happiness moved her. She went on : " I said—I knew—you were a good man. "

" Well, " he answered, but not as if he was answering her, " for one night. "

His furred hood hid his face. The wakening blush dyed her clear face again, as she said : " Let me see you. Let me see your face. "

" Why ? "

On the word she faltered, confused. She did not know why. She stammered : " Because of what you have done—of what we owe you. "

" We ? "

" My brothers and I. Derek's still alive. I almost think he's sleeping better—more natural. When—when Garth comes home, he'll thank you as I'd like to. "

She looked up into the shadowed face, wistfully. He had turned from her again, and was gazing down the trail. After a moment, he said : " There's coffee on the back of the stove, and some cornbread. You'd better eat it. I've had some. "

She went meekly, shamed that she had slept while her saviour served himself. She would have liked to serve him. Something strange and stormy was shaking her ; she had no name for it. The food choked her, hungry as she was, but she ate it obediently.

She had scarcely finished, when he called her. She ran and joined him at the door. Something in his voice thrilled

her; she saw in him again that strange and threatening immobility of the night before.

He said, swiftly: "You're lookin' for your brother to come back?"

"Yes, yes. Any time."

"With another man?"

"With the doctor. Why?"

He raised his arm and pointed. In the blinding dazzle of sun on snow, she saw two small, dark figures, just rounding the curve of the trail.

Her heart rose and flooded her with a passion of thankfulness. She said, quietly, after a minute: "Yes, yes, it's him and the doctor. Now—now, you'll let him thank you, as you—won't let me."

Her words ended almost in a question, for she saw that, while she had been eating, he had taken his rifle on his arm and put on his snowshoes. Suddenly, she began to tremble a little, aware of something in his silence, his stillness, which vaguely threatened.

He swung upon her suddenly—one would have said, savagely, but that he was laughing. Those two black figures down the trail were sweeping rapidly nearer. All the latent fierceness of the man had flamed into being, at their approach. He laid a hard, slim hand on Dorette's shoulder and turned her, so that, at less than arm's length, she faced him. He said, softly, in the midst of his almost noiseless laughter: "I'll show you how you can thank me."

She looked up at him, her face colourless, her lips parted. In the shadow of the hood his eyes gleamed at her, his face bent nearer. The world fell away from her; there was nothing left in life for a minute but that face, that voice.

She just breathed: "Who are you?"

"You'll know in a minute!" He looked swiftly from her to the two men down the trail. They were coming on fast. He seemed to be measuring his distance from them.

When they were so near that their faces were all but discernible, he caught the girl to him. She was slack in his hold; all her life seemed to be in her dazed eyes; she would have fallen, but that he held her with an arm like a steel bar. And twice and three times he kissed her.

"That's how you can thank me!" He released her laughing still.

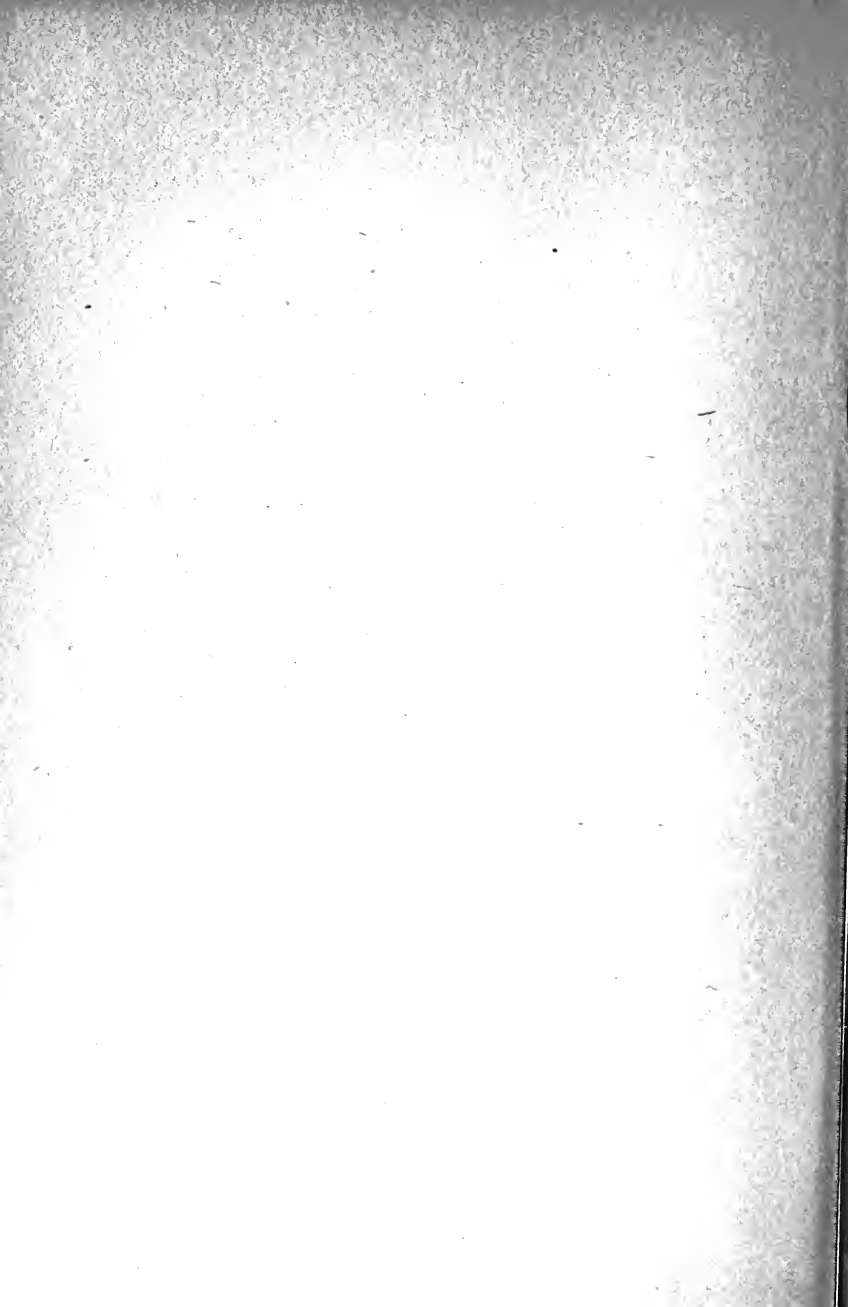
She staggered, her hands over her red mouth. With the movement of release he thrust her, rough and swift, within the door of the cabin. A bullet sent a spray of dusty snow over him. She saw, in one reeling instant, Garth on his knee down the trail, rifle levelled for another shot; the other, a laughing shadow, slipping from her hands, from her life, into the shadow of the forest from which he had come.

Another shot, wide of the mark; Garth leaping to his feet again and tearing towards her, followed by the doctor who was to save Derek, and whom he had found at last, thirty miles beyond Mandore. But she had no eyes for them—for a moment, no heart.

Eyes and heart were on that other figure at the edge of the trees, swift, terrible, laughing, calling to her with raised hand—

"Tell him you kissed Maxime Dufour!"

When Garth reached her side, she was on her knees, laughing and sobbing, striving, with her scarred small hands to obliterate his trail in the snow.



LA BLANCHISSEUSE DORÉE



LA BLANCHISSEUSE DORÉE

AS Père Barthélemy turned out of the gusty, dusty street, where the wind had been tugging rudely at his old soutane, and into Mère Bazane's yard, he stepped into peace. Smiling, he flicked the dust off his sleeve with delicate fingers, looking at the tubs under the apple-trees, at the little gray shanty, and at the sign over the door. It seemed to him that the tarnished letters were full of little, gaping mouths, ready to snap at a possible customer. Some penniless student had painted the sign for her, long ago; "La Blanchisseuse Dorée," in a fat flourish of gold. "Long ago," said Père Barthélemy, with something of a sigh, "when she was not called the White-foot for nothing."

But there she was, toiling at her tubs, and Père Barthélemy knew she needed smiles from him, not sighs.

"The peace of God be upon you, Mère Bazane."

"And upon you, mon père." The little woman looked up from her reverie with a quick smile, and her eyes, in her small, weather-beaten face, were still as blue as wild flax. "It is a beautiful day, mon père."

"Dusty and gusty in the streets."

"Ah, the streets, my father! I am out of them here, and glad to be so. Sometimes a bird comes to the apple-trees, and when they are in leaf I look up among their boughs and think I am in my old home again. We had an orchard there."

"A beautiful one, my friend?" Père Barthélemy's keen, brown eyes were very soft.

"An orchard is always beautiful, my father."

"That is true. And how is your good husband to-day?"

The accustomed mist of grief dimmed the blue eyes of the Golden Washerwoman. "Ah, my father, he is no better; he will never be better. Ah, the poor child, how he suffers!"

All last night I was rubbing him with oils. But I mind nothing, if I can keep my strength and get him all he needs. He is much younger than I." Her little, knotted hands shook upon the side of the tub. "I weep in the night when I think of it. What if I should die first, and leave him uncared for?"

Something, that might have been admiration, rippled over the priest's calm, brown face. "I am not old, Mère Bezane. Will you trust me? While I live I will never forget him."

"Ah, mon père!" Her hands shook still more. "That is good, that is of a heavenly kindness. But no one can understand him but I, no one does him justice, no one can guess his sufferings. And he speaks to me with such affection! Only this morning, he said, 'Hola! my little, old cabbage,' he said, 'make me some good soup.' The brave heart! Will you not see him?"

"I have no time, and I must not hinder you when you are so busy."

"Yes, I am busy, thank the saints. It is a lady's dress, my father, and the work upon it is wonderful." Her fingers sought the fine lace, wistfully. "But before it came to me it received, not a washing, but a massacre."

That evening, Monsieur le Curé went to see his friend, the doctor.

Le Docteur Simon was hard at work among his hollyhocks when Père Barthélemy leaned over the gate. "Ha!" said he, pointing a trowel at his visitor. "I can see where you have been! You have been with our Blanchisseuse Dorée."

"Yes," said the curé, quietly, "and I have come to ask you—is there anything the matter with that villainous husband of hers?"

"I do not know," said Simon, gruffly, making the earth fly, like a digging terrier.

"There were bruises on her arm again," said Père Barthélemy, slowly. "I have thought much of that matter, my friend."

"So have I." The doctor spoke from a shower of flying earth. "And I will tell you this. The brute will die, if

he dies at all, from eating, and lying still. Unless by the judgment of God. But that is *your* department."

"Our poor little Golden Washerwoman! How long is she to endure?"

"Till her heart breaks. You have all influence. Why do you not have the brute removed?"

"I have thought much, Simon. And I have thought—I have guessed—that it would not be for her happiness."

"Ha!" said the doctor, again, with a look at the curé.

"Ha. This Love!"

"Just so, my friend. We cannot meddle with it."

The doctor grunted among his hollyhocks. "Yes, this Love. I have seen many manifestations; many symptoms of it. The heroic symptom has never shown itself so plainly as in the case of our Blanchisseuse Dorée. Name of a name! If I were *you*, my dear, I should never be surprised to see a hale young angel or two helping her with the wringing, and half the powers of heaven on guard among her apple trees."

"And there is no hope for her release?"

"Speaking as a doctor, no. As a man"—the doctor was small, and of a wicked, selfish humour—"as a man, I am so greatly tempted to tell the pig to drink his liniments someday—"

Père Barthélemy laughed. "He is of my flock, and I say that a long purgatory is his only chance. Well, well! What would she say if she heard us?"

"Those sort of creatures always live long. Perhaps you can tell me why. These slugs are manifold as my good intentions, and will have a like fate. Remember our Blanchisseuse in your prayers."

But for once, the doctor was wrong. La Blanchisseuse's husband died, quite suddenly, and she was a widow. Upon Père Barthélemy came the weight of her wild grief.

"O, mon père, he is gone, he is gone! Dead before me, and he so much younger! You should have seen him when he came courting me. Such a fine lad, and even then I was plain and hard-favoured. I cannot believe it. O Mother of Sorrows, give him back to me! I was weak, I was wicked. When he called me, sometimes I came slowly. My legs were stiff with rheumatism, but I should have hastened. And

often I fell asleep when I was rubbing him. O, my father, how shall I live without him?"

"She will not live," said the curé. But the doctor said: "Wait. That grief must find healing."

The Golden Washerwoman awoke, at last, to a sense of other things than her loneliness. She need be the Golden Washerwoman no more. There was the insurance to meet the dues for which she had striven for years, urged and helped by Père Barthélemy. *La Blanchisseuse Dorée* was rich, mon Dieu, as rich as any lonely woman need be. My faith, she had money in the bank. *Regardez la!*

"I will buy mourning," she said, "such mourning as will become my age."

So she bought cheap, black materials, and made them up herself, after long-forgotten fashion-plates of twenty years before. A little monument in grief, veiled in crape, she attended mass and spoke long to the priest who loved her. "She begins to take an interest in her dresses," said he to his friend the doctor. In the luxury of buying, *Mère Bazane* found a little comfort.

And presently, the crape upon her gown gave place to black lace, very deep, and of a heavy pattern, the like of which had never been seen in the parish. She bought a chain of large jet beads, linked with gold. A brooch of black enamel, roped with gold, bore a little blackish portrait of her husband. There was a dreadful mourning ring upon one of her little, knotted fingers. The flock of Père Barthélemy wondered and admired.

Upon the day when the old sign, "*La Blanchisseuse Dorée*" disappeared from above her door, and she herself appeared in penetrating purple ribbons, Monsieur le Curé went to see her.

"The peace of God be upon you, *Mère Bazane*."

The Golden Washerwoman, smaller and more meagre than ever before, rustled her heavy, black draperies upon the floor, and wept upon Père Barthélemy's hand.

"How is it with you, *Mère Bazane*?"

"Well, well, mon père. The emptiness of the heart is terrible, and the nights are full of a voice that does not call me, that will never call me again. Sometimes I look for my

tubs under the trees, and for a little I am desolate that I need them no more. And then—"

"And then?"

"Then I go and buy things, my father." She raised brave, blue eyes, like the eyes of a child. "It helps me to forget, it fills the emptiness, seest thou? I have never bought things before. When I washed the fine dresses of rich ladies, I used to lay the lace against my hands, because I loved it. It was beautiful. And I had never had anything that was beautiful." She smoothed the deep, black flounce of her dress with a little hand that was always tremulous now. "This is beautiful, too, but it has no colour. Colour warms me like a fire, mon père; fills me like a food. Is it a sin?"

"It is no sin, my friend."

"Come then, and I will show. At first I was afraid. That was a sin, to be afraid of thee."

She went to a little wooden chest, and raised the lid. It was as if a rainbow had flashed suddenly into the dark, damp room. *La Blanchisseuse Dorée* laid her tremulous hands upon a silk web of pure colour within, and drew it out—pale blue, the colour of spring skies. Upon that she shook a length of rose-coloured satin, damasked in a pattern of butterflies. And then a glow of crimson silk, worked in tiny silver flowers.

"When my mourning is ended," she explained, fondling the gorgeous fabrics, feverishly, "I can wear these. Meantime, I buy them, my father."

Something nearer tears than laughter took *Père Barthélemy* by the throat, as he thought of the little washerwoman dressed in these silks.

"She will waste all her money," he said, anxiously, to *Le Docteur Simon*, "buying these things."

"Let her," answered the doctor, "if it makes her happy."

"It does not make her happy," said *Père Barthélemy*, quietly. He knew his *Blanchisseuse Dorée*.

As time went on, the Golden Washerwoman broke further from the bounds of decorous mourning. The flock was interested, if a little scandalized. She adopted the royal colour of grief, and upon it played infinite variations, in

which she trotted to church, like an army with banners. The two men who honoured her were troubled.

"If you had not touched wine for thirty years, it would not take much to make you drunk," said Le Docteur Simon.

"She is searching feverishly for happiness," said Père Barthélemy.

When Mère Bazane appeared in a purple dress, with large white spots, the curé was taking a hard-earned rest among the hills. But he heard of it. And on his return, he went straight to her house.

As he turned out of the dusty street, he saw her under the apple trees, toiling above her old tubs. She was singing as she worked, in a worn, sweet voice, of a fair Isabeau of long ago, who walked in her garden. And above her head the leafless apple boughs stretched a gray web of shadows, and the old sign creaked in the wind.

"Mère Bazane!"

"Ah, mon père! Ah, mon père, I need nothing now to complete my happiness. It is by the blessing of God that you are returned. I die of joy."

"But—my dear, you are working again?"

"Ah, my father, there is need!" She spoke as if in triumph, and her blue eyes gleamed among the gentle wrinkles.

"Need? Your money—?"

"Safe in the bank, and there it will stay. Come, my father, and see!" She led him to the open door, and pointed within.

Upon the floor sat a fat, dark child, some three years old. He had pulled the end of the rose-coloured satin out of the chest, and wrapped himself in it. He gazed at Mère Bazane and the curé with sullen, dark eyes, set rather close in a small, heavy face.

"See him, the beautiful! He is the orphan of my dear husband's nephew. Now I am so rich, they have let me take him to bring up. Shall I not be rich for his sake? Mon Dieu, how I will work and save!"

Her voice trembled with her little, knotted, fluttering hands. She moved to draw the silk away. "Give it to me, my angel."

The angel wrapped himself in the rich folds tighter than ever, and screamed harshly, like a fierce bird that has no words. La Blanchisseuse Dorée looked up, flushed and panting. "See," she said, proudly, "already he wants all the fine things he sees, and fights for them. Is he not clever? Such a determined mind for his age. And he shall have all he wants, the little one. Mon Dieu! how I will wash and bleach. I will never grow tired."

The child, released, wrapped himself again in the soft satin, and resumed his sullen, steady stare. Père Barthélemy stood, chilled and silent, seeing the whole tragedy of sacrifice renewed. He saw the small, dark thing for ever asking, demanding, claiming. La Blanchisseuse forever toiling to supply, until—until she was cast aside, like a worn-out husk. He shrank from the child, as from a little full-fed vampire.

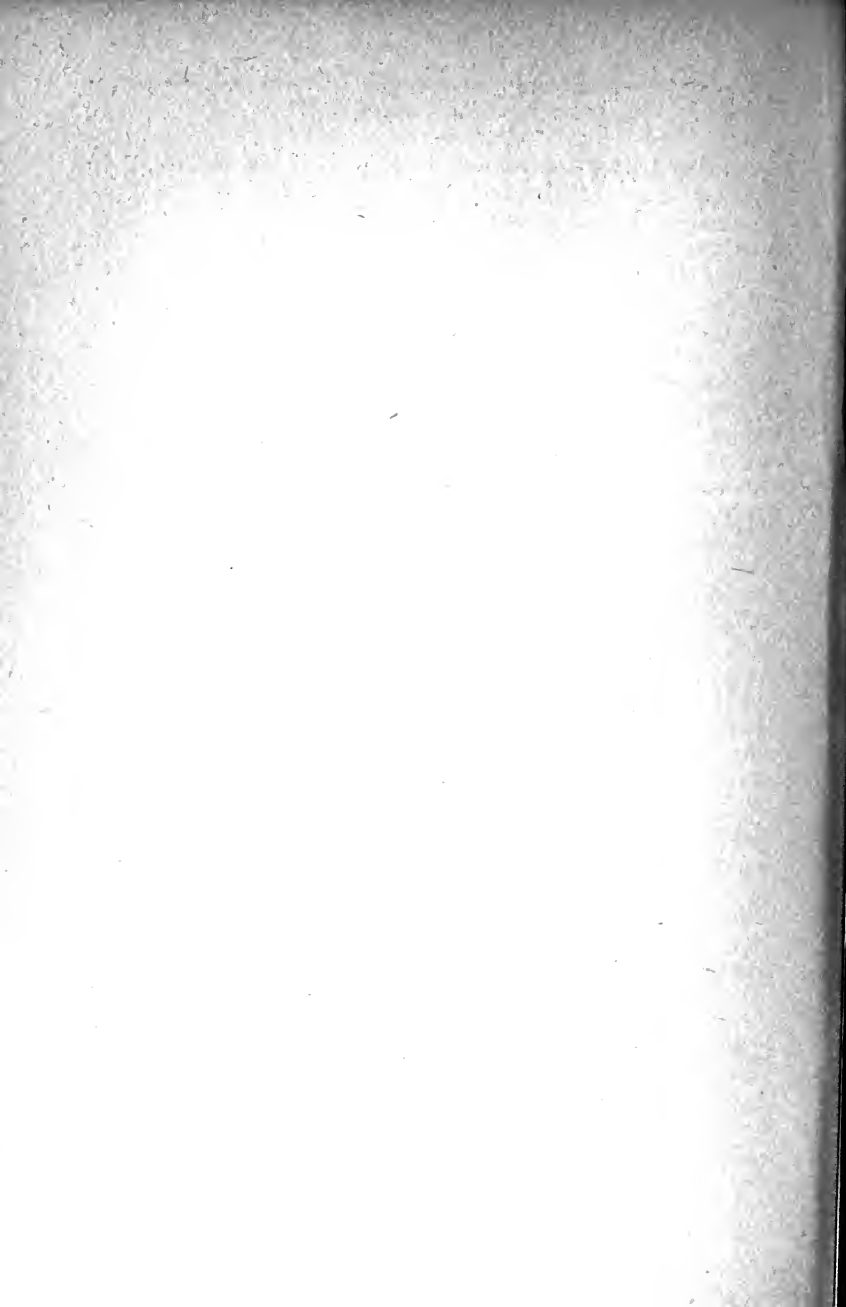
And then the true thought burst winged from his heart.

"She has her reward already," he thought.

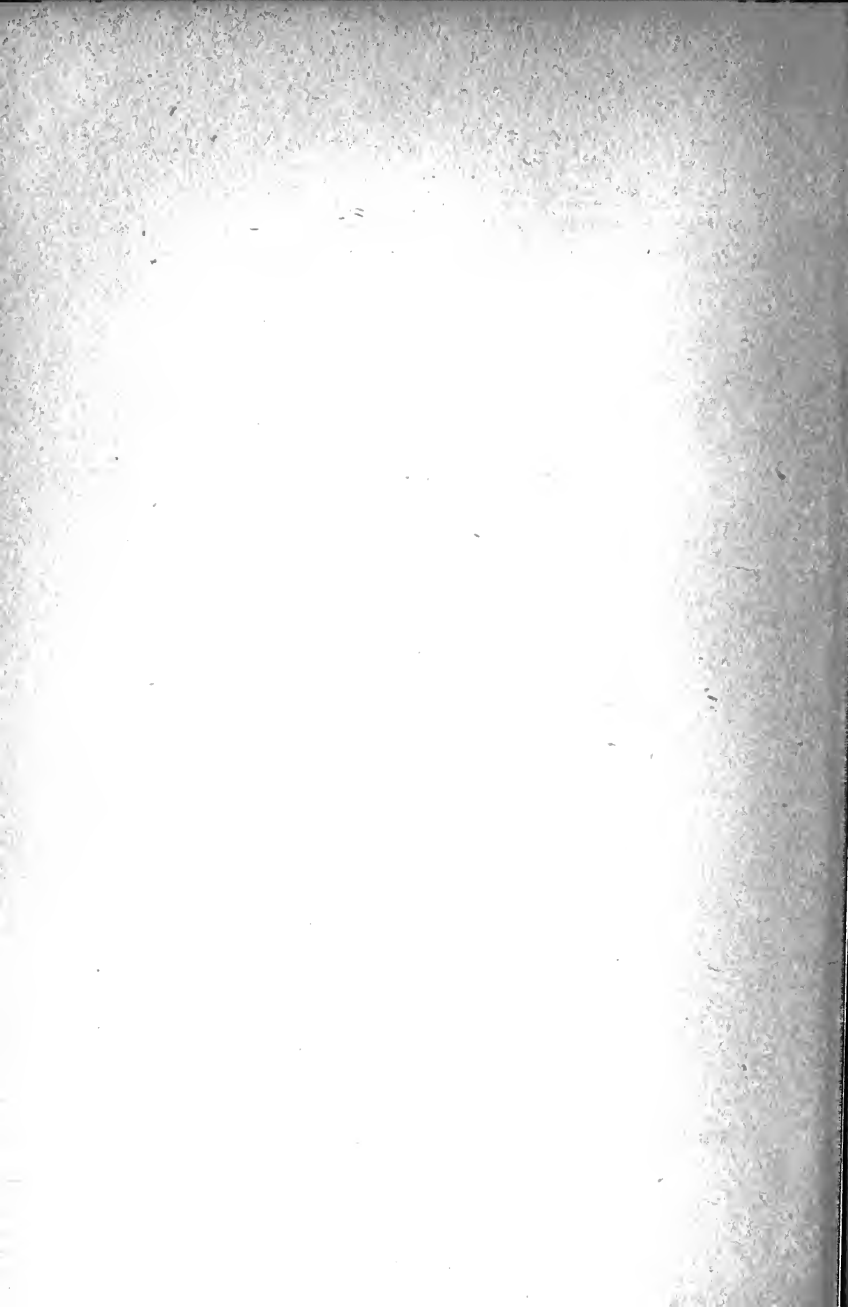
"I shall cut up my dresses to make things for him," said the Golden Washerwoman, happily, "and spend no more money, no indeed. He will want it all, all. And he shall have it. Mon Dieu, how I will work."

Père Barthélemy's eyes were dim as he raised his hand and made the sign of the cross. "Of such are the kingdom of heaven," he said, softly.

But he did not say them of the child, as the Golden Washerwoman thought.



THE LOST SPRING



THE LOST SPRING

SITTING in the sun outside the skin-house, old Eetah will tell you of the time they lost a Spring on the Little Moon.

As in most other places, they only have one Spring a year there. But it comes so late, and is so short, they love it even more than other folk. When the sun comes back from the south, bringing the wildfowl with it ; when the ice melts a little on the long, long, gravel beaches ; when the moss turns green, and the saxifrage and stone-crop bud, then it is Spring on the Little Moon, and everybody is glad.

But one winter, Ka-leet lent a harpoon to the angekok.

It was a lovely harpoon. The haft was walrus-ivory, cunningly fitted and carved with hunting stories. The blade was hammered hoop iron from a whale ship. "I'll lend you this," said Ka-leet, "till the Spring. Then you must give it back to me. But you may use it till the Spring comes."

The angekok went back to his snow house, and thought. He wanted to keep that harpoon. So he went out and travelled south till he met the Spring. He caught it and put it in a skin bag, and carried it home with him, and hung it up in a dark corner of his snow house. The Spring went to sleep in the bag, and no one on the Little Moon saw a sign of it ; the birds did not come back, nor the seal, nor the salmon. It was winter all the time, and the people stayed in their snow houses and were sick for lack of the sun.

"We will go south," they said, "and find new places to hunt in, before we die of hunger." But the wicked angekok went out and called the Winter down from the North. Out of the North came the Winter ; it came in the shape of a great bear, made of ice, cold, blue-green, glittering ice all through. Only within its body a great, still heart, a heart

that never beat, shone like a frozen star. The Bear sat down between the Little Moon and the south, and no one could pass that way.

All the men of the tribe gathered together, the strong hunters and the wise old men ; and they stood in a half-circle in front of the Bear, and threw darts and harpoons, and great stones at him. But the weapons could not pierce him, nor the stones hurt him.

Then the women came, and they gathered drift-wood, and precious sticks, and spear-handles from this house and that ; and they brought the biggest soapstone cooking-lamps, and lighted them and lighted fires, to see if they might melt the Bear. But the great Bear, that was the Winter, bent his nose to the snow, and breathed once. All the flames went out, and the ashes were covered with ice, and everyone ran away. They were frightened. Even the angekok began to be frightened, for he could not get rid of the Bear he had called. The people went back to their houses and stayed there, very quiet, waiting to die. They were afraid, as they had never been before. If a man crawled to the entrance of his igloo and looked out, he saw only the Bear sitting in front of the village, resting his nose on the snow. The starlight and the aurora shone on his icy pelt, so that sometimes he was blue, sometimes rosy, and sometimes golden as fire. But he was always there, so that presently no one even bothered to go and look.

The only one who still went to look was Mit-kah, the little daughter of Ka-leet.

Mit-kah was the littlest, brownest, merriest thing that ever lived within thirty degrees of the Pole. She was not afraid of anything, and she had many thoughts. Gentle thoughts flowered in her heart as thick as stone-crop flowers in the sun. She used to crawl out of Ka-leet's house and look at the Bear ; and then she would go and listen outside the magic house, the angekok's house, because she always heard music there. It was the Spring, singing in its sleep in the skin bag, but no one else heard it, not even the angekok. Then she would go away by herself, and think.

She thought a great deal about two things. She wondered why, if they were all dying for want of the Spring, it was not

possible to go and borrow some Spring from someone else, as they had borrowed oil once from the Big Moon people when their own stores failed. And she was sorry for the Bear.

She thought he looked very cold and unhappy, sitting there with his nose in the snow, so far away from his home. And one night, when she saw him, all gray in the bitter starlight, she pulled her best hood out of the bag she kept her clothes in, and crept out and went and put it on the Bear to keep his ears warm.

It was a lovely hood, made of finest sealskin, with a long tail behind, and worked in patterns of red and white feathers. It was quite a little hood, but, somehow, it fitted the Bear ; it must have stretched. Mit-kah reached up and pulled it well over his stony, icy ears, and tied it under his chin, all bearded with icicles. It froze on immediately, and Mit-kah was a little sorry to think she'd never be able to get it off again. But she thought the great Bear looked at her gratefully out of his ice-eyes, and his still, glittering heart beat once.

"Well, his head is warmer," said little Mit-kah, "but his poor feet must be very cold."

Day and night, the great Bear, that was the Winter, sat in front of the village in the snow. And, at last, the thought of his cold toes worried Mit-kah so, that she took a set of new dog-shoes her father had just made, and crept out, and fitted them on the Bear.

The shoes were little, and the Bear was huge, but somehow they went on ; and he held up one foot after another, like a puppy, and little Mit-kah tied the thongs about his frosty legs. This time, he turned his terrible, gleaming head, and looked at her, and his frozen heart beat twice, flaming like a star. And Mit-kah went away and sat behind the angekok's house, listening to the music ; it was sweeter than ever, for the Spring in the skin bag was dreaming in its sleep.

Then she thought that the Bear must be hungry, sitting there for no reason at all, and never going away to catch fish ; so she took her own dinner of dried salmon and fish-oil, and put it in a bowl and offered it to the Bear.

He ate it, every scrap, and Mit-kah watched him. She forgot her own hunger, it was so wonderfully interesting to

see the bits of fish going down inside the Bear, who was, of course, transparent. When he had finished it, his great heart beat three times, and he got up and shook himself. Then he looked thoughtfully at Mit-kah, who was standing, just a little speck, between his front dog-shoes.

"No one has ever done anything kind to me before," said the great Bear, who was the Winter, and his voice was like the clanging of sledge-runners on ice, "nor even said anything kind. Why were you kind, little Mit-kah?"

"I don't know," said Mit-kah, with her thumb in her mouth. It is wrong to speak with your thumb in your mouth but she did not know any better.

"That's the best sort of kindness," said the Bear, very gently, "and the least I can do in return, is to go away. But is there anything I can do for you first?"

"You might tell me where the Spring is," answered Mit-kah.

"Hanging up in a bag in your angekok's house," said the Bear. "Didn't you know?"

"No," said Mit-kah, "I didn't, and thank you very much for telling me. I'll just go straight away and let it out." For she was not afraid of anything.

"I'm afraid that won't do," replied the Bear, apologetically. "You see, it's so cold from my being about here so long, that if you let the Spring out of the bag, it'll just die."

"Then couldn't I go and borrow some elsewhere?"

"N—n—no, I'm afraid that won't do, either." The Bear shook his head, regretfully. "You see, there's never more than enough to go round, as it is."

"Then what am I to do?" asked Mit-kah, sadly.

"I don't know, unless you could find something even warmer than the Spring, to warm the bag before it wakes up. Look here, I don't know much about such things, but if you came home with me, the Old Woman could tell you."

"What Old Woman?"

The Bear looked surprised. "Why, the Old Sky Woman. She housekeeps for the lot of us, you know—all the Weathers and the Seasons. If there's anything warmer than the Spring, she could tell you of it. Wonderful things she has

at home ! But perhaps you would be afraid to come with me ? ”

“ Why should I be afraid ? ” said Mit-kah.

The Bear stretched his terrible head, and snuffed the air towards the North Star. “ Many fear me, but not all,” he said. “ Come if you will, little Mit-kah.”

Then he made himself all flat in the snow, and she climbed upon his neck, and held on by the long tail of the hood. And the Bear got up, and went swiftly away, northwards ; very swiftly he ran, glisading over the glittering snow, and wherever he went, there it became cold as death. But little Mit-kah was quite warm.

When Ka-leet looked for her and could not find her, he went away from the lamp, and lay in a corner, weeping. For he thought she had wandered away and died. Nothing comforted him, not even when they told him that the Bear was gone. And as yet the Spring did not come.

Meanwhile, Mit-kah and the Bear went north and north, so far that they could go no farther, till they came to the place where the Bear lived, and the igloo of the Old Sky Woman. Never had Mit-kah seen such a house ; it cricked her neck to look at the top of the entrance-tunnel, and as for the living-place behind, it had neither top nor bottom, nor beginning nor end. It was like a cloud. Here the Old Sky Woman sat over a great cooking-pot and a clear fire ; and about her the Stars and the Weathers, the Winds and the Seasons, went in and out ; but she sat still and cooked.

The Bear, that was the Winter, went in to the fire, and lay down beside it in his place. Then, for the first time, Mit-kah was frightened, and looked, and did not know what she saw ; and listened, and did not know what she heard, only she knew that a hand came down sometimes and stirred the stuff in the pot ; and that across the fire a caribou buck lifted his head and looked at her, and his eyes were softer than sleep, and there were stars in his antlers. “ That is the South-west Wind,” said the Bear to her, softly. “ He is the only one at home. He is kind. Don’t be afraid.” But Mit-kah crouched low on the Bear’s neck and hid her face.

Then the Old Sky Woman stooped her head from the cloudy roof of her igloo, and asked what Mit-kah wanted.

“Mother,” said the Bear, very respectfully, “she wants to know if there is anything warmer than the Spring. The Little Moon angekok has caught their Spring and hung it up in a skin bag in his house, and there it sleeps. If it woke without warmth, it will die in the cold. Is there anything warmer than the Spring? I am Winter. I know nothing about such things.”

“Yes,” said the Old Sky Woman, “there is one thing warmer than Spring. It is the fire under my cooking-pot. It is called Love, and you’ll find it anywhere, but it’s hard to put your hand on sometimes.”

“I am Winter,” said the Bear, again, “I know nothing about Love. I have only one gift, and that is Sleep. But will you give her some of your fire, Mother?”

“Yes,” answered the Old Sky Woman, “she shall have some of my fire. But she must carry it in her hands, and go away from here quickly, or it will go out, and I can’t have it wasted.”

“Hold out your hands, Mit-kah,” said the Bear, softly, “you shall have some of the fire that is warmer than Spring, and with it, you shall wake the Spring. Hold out your hands, and do not fear, it will not burn you.”

Then Mit-kah held out her little brown hands, joined together, and the Old Sky Woman took the great spoon with which she stirred in her pot, and lifted in it a tiny ember from the fire, and laid it in Mit-kah’s hands. It did not burn her. It shone in a clear flame between her curved hands, and it was warm as sunlight, and sweet as willow-buds. Mit-kah laughed with happiness, and was not afraid.

“Carry it like that,” said the Old Sky Woman, “or you will lose it. And take it away quickly.”

Then the great Buck, who was the South-west Wind, rose and came round the fire, and the stars in his antlers were like fish in a net. “You are swift, Brother,” he said to the Bear, “but you are not so swift as I. I will take Mit-kah home.” His voice was soft as running water when the rivers break free, and Mit-kah looked into his eyes, and

the flame of Love that she carried in her hands was reflected in his eyes like two more stars.

"Go with the Wind, little Mit-kah," said the Bear, drowsily. "He is swifter than I, but he does not love you so well. Do not forget me, little Mit-kah."

"I will not forget you," said Mit-kah. She slid from the Bear's neck, and stood in front of him, gazing into his eyes. It was like gazing into one of the blue pools that form in the ice on warm days; but far down in them, the flame she carried was reflected. Then the Bear shut his eyes lazily, and went to sleep by the fire. And the Old Sky Woman lifted Mit-kah and set her on the back of the Caribou Buck, and he bore her out of the igloo and southward over the snow.

Mit-kah, carrying the flame, had nothing to hold on by, but she did not need anything. The Bear had been smooth and swift, but the great Buck fled like a cloud, and his antlers caught new stars from the sky as a net catches fish. With him, went the sound of rain and the melting of waters and the rushing wings of birds. And so they came to the Little Moon.

The Buck knelt down and made himself all small, and Mit-kah slid from his neck and stood before him, and thanked him prettily, but he did not pay much attention to her, though his eyes were so soft and kind. Before she had finished, he had risen and snuffed the air and stamped the earth with his forefoot; then he fled away, moving like a cloud under the stars, and which went with him and which stayed in the sky, Mit-kah could not tell. She went soberly down to her village, carrying the fire.

She stood in the midst of the dark snow-houses and called aloud to her people. One by one they answered her, and came crawling out. Ka-leet was the first, and he ran to Mit-kah, and would have taken her in his arms, but he saw the fire in her little brown hands, and was afraid. "Are you Mit-kah?" he said, "or are you a ghost?" "Are you dead, or have you come back to die with us?"

"I am not dead," said Mit-kah, "I have come back to wake the Spring for you."

Then, the flame as still as a flower in her hands, she went to the house of the angekok, all the people following her.

She crawled into the house, the people following her, Ka-leet the first. When the angekok saw her come in, carrying the small, bright flame, he fell on his face. But Mit-kah paid no attention to him. For out of the bag on the wall came a single clear, sweet note, like the mating call of a bird.

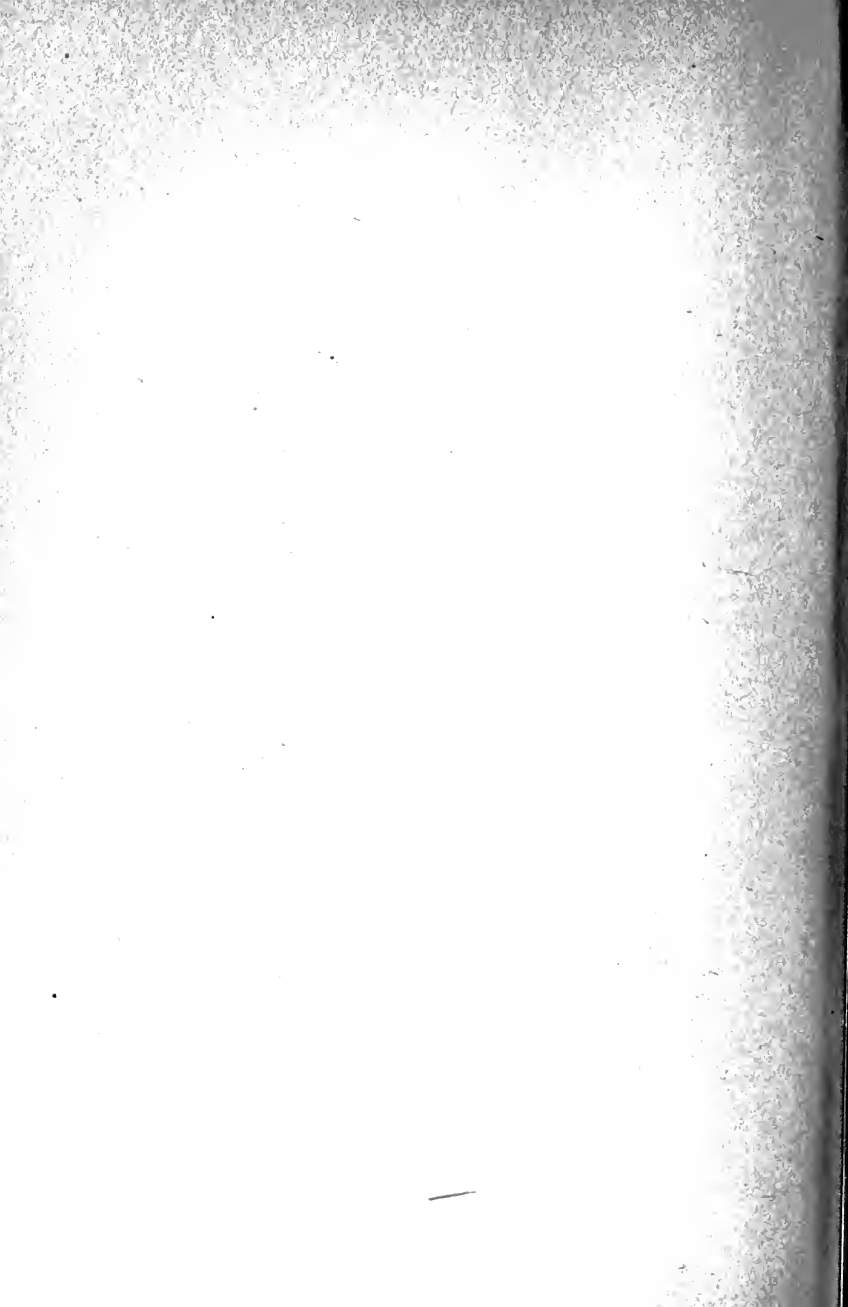
"That is the Spring waking!" cried Mit-kah.

She stood under the skin bag, where the angekok had kept the Spring, and raised the flame towards it. And the flame left her hands and floated upwards, and enclosed the skin bag in a tender light, a warmth and a shining. Then the bag opened, and out of it came the waking Spring.

What was it like? I don't know. Light, and swiftness, and joy, leaves, wings, and little stars—the memory of all these, and the hope of all that are to come, Mit-kah let loose from the bag. Outside, the sun came back from the south like a swan; the ice melted, the salmon leaped in the rivers, the moss greened, and a thousand tiny flowers opened under the rocks. The people all ran out to look, but Ka-leet stayed behind in the angekok's house, holding his little daughter in his arms.

In all hearts, also, the winter was past. And the angekok got up and put a good face on it and returned the harpoon.

THE THIRD GENERATION



THE THIRD GENERATION

No shanty fires shall cheer them,
No comrades march beside,
But the northern lights shall beckon
And the wandering winds shall guide.
They shall cross the silent waters
By a trail that is wild and far,
To the place of the lonely lodges
Under a lonely star.

La Longue Traverse.

"BOB, is this Lake Lemaire?"

Bob Lemaire, leaning against a wind-twisted tamarack on the ridge above the portage, looked long and very long at the desolate country spread out beneath them. Then he looked at a map, drawn on parchment in faded ink, which he had just unfolded from a waterproof case. "I can't identify it," he confessed at last, "but I think—"

"If you say another word," groaned Barrett, "about the reliability of your grandfather, I—I'll heave rocks at you." Lemaire smiled slowly, and the smile transfigured his lean, serious face; he folded the map and replaced it in the little case. "Well," he answered, comfortingly, "we can't mistake P'tite Babiche, anyway, when we come to it."

"If the thing exists. . . Oh, I know your grandfather said he found it, and stuck it on his map. But no one else has ever found it since."

"No one else," said Lemaire, quietly, "has been so far west from the Gran' Babiche."

He looked again at the land, one of the most desolate in the world, across which they must go. Lake, rapid, river; rock, scrub, pine, and caribou moss—here the world held only these things, repeated to infinity. But as Lemaire's grave eyes rested on them, those eyes showed nothing but stillness and a strange content. And Barrett, who had been

watching his friend and not the new chain of lakes ahead, cried suddenly, "Bob, I believe you like it!"

"Yes, I like it—if like is the word."

"O gosh! And you never saw it till five years ago?"

"No."

"And your father never saw it at all?"

"No. He married young, you know, and had no money. He worked in an office all his life. My mother said he used to talk in his sleep of—all this—which he had never seen. And when I saw it, it just seemed to—come natural." He smiled again. "We've three—four—more portages," he went on, "before we camp."

"And it's along of having Forbes Lemaire for a grandfather," groaned Barrett, as he limped after Lemaire's light stride, down the rocky slope to the little beach where they had left their canoe.

They launched the canoe, thigh deep in the rush of the ice-clear water, and put out into yet another of that endless chain of unknown and uncharted lakes whose course they were following. Only one map in the world showed these lakes, those low iron hills, that swamp—the map made by Bob Lemaire's grandfather fifty years before; as far as was known, only one white man before themselves had ever tried the journey from the Gran' Babiche due west to the P'tite Babiche, that mythical river; and that had been Forbes Lemaire. As Barrett said, it was a tour personally conducted by the ghost of a grandfather.

Another wet portage—tripping and sliding under a low cliff among fallen shale and willow bushes—another lake, as wide, as lonely, as the former one. So for three hours. And then the afternoon shut down in drive on drive of damp gray mist; and they edged the canoe inshore, and beached it at last upon a dun ridge of sand, the shadows of dwarfed bullpines promising firing.

Too tired to speak, they made their camp, deftly, as long practice had taught them. Tinned beef, flapjacks and coffee had power, however, to change the very aspect of the weather. And Barrett, smoking the pipe of repletion, under a wisp of tent, had time to admire the Japanese effect of the writhed pines in the fog, to hear a sort of wild music in the voices

of rain and water, and to meditate on the chances of an ouananiche for the morning's meal.

The shadows of the fog were changing to the shadows of night, and the silent Lemaire rose and flung wood on the fire. It sent out a warm glow; and as if it had been a signal, a living shadow crept from the shadow of the rocks, and very timidly approached the light.

Both men rose with an exclamation; for they had not seen a human being for nearly a month. Barrett said, "An Indian," and sank back on his blanket, leaving Lemaire to ask questions. Lemaire went round the fire, and stooped over the queer huddled shadow on the ground.

"Well?" Barrett called after him at last.

"A Montagnais," Lemaire answered after a pause, some trouble in his voice. "About the oldest old Indian I've ever seen; they aren't long-lived. . . . He seems a bit wrong in the head. He doesn't seem to know his name or where he comes from. But—he says he's going to a big encampment many day's journey west. He says he's been following us. He says he's a friend of mine."

"Is he?"

"I never saw him before. . . That's all I can get out of him. He's probably been cast off by his tribe. Why? Oh, too old to be useful."

"Cruel brutes."

"Not so cruel as some white men," said Lemaire, half to himself. He had come back to the firelight, and was rummaging among their stores, none too plentiful. He returned to the old Indian, carrying food; and presently Barrett heard snapping sounds, as of a hungry dog feeding. Lemaire came again to his nook under the tent; and Barrett smoked out his pipe in silence. Then, as he knocked the ashes, fizzling, into a little pool of rain, he said gently, "Bob, what makes you so uncommonly good to the Indians?"

Quiet Lemaire did not attempt to evade the direct question. But a rather shy flush rose to his dark, lean cheeks as he said diffidently, "I suppose—because I feel my family—any one of my name—owes 'em something."

"The grandfather again, eh?"

"Yes. . . . Men had no souls in those days, Barrett. I

think the tremendous loneliness—the newness—the lack of responsibility—something killed their souls. . . . Wait.”

Leaning forward, he flung more wood on the fire. And the red light flickered on his strong and gentle face. He glanced at his friend, and went on abruptly. “I’ve my grandfather’s maps and journals, you know—what my father called the shameful records of his fame. He was absolutely explicit in ’em. I never saw them in father’s lifetime, but he left them to me, saying I could read them or not, as I liked. I was very proud of them. I read them. And upon my word—though from them I got the hints that may lead us to the rediscovery of the Lost Babiche—I’m almost sorry I did. It leaves a bad taste in the mind, if you know what I mean, to think that one’s father’s father was such a heroic scoundrel.”

“A bad record, Bobby?”

“Bad even for those days. Listen to me. While he was on this very expedition we’re on now, he was taken sick. He was very sick, and going to be worse. He knew what it was. He was near the big summer camp of a tribe of Indians that had been very kind to him, coast Indians, come inland for the caribou hunting; he went to them. He was sick, and they took him in, and nursed him. And all the time he knew what it was he had. It was the small-pox.

“You know what La Picotte is in the wilds. They’ve a song about it still, down along the Lamennais. . . For of all that tribe, only one family, they say, escaped. All the others died; they died as if the Angel of Destruction had come among them with his sword—they died like flies, they died in heaps. And over the bones of the dead the tepees stood for years, ragged, blowing in the winds. And then the skins rotted, and the bare poles stood, gleaming white, over the rotting bones that covered an acre of ground, they say. No one ever went to that place any more. It was cursed. . . because of my grandfather.”

“Monsieur Forbes made his get-away?”

“Yes, or I shouldn’t be telling you about it.” Lemaire summoned a smile, but his eyes were sombre. “And so I guess—that’s one reason why. One among many.”

"You're a likeable old freak," murmured Barrett affectionately, "but—*you* ain't responsible, you know!"

"As I look at it, we're all responsible."

"Well—anyway, I wouldn't give that old scarecrow too much of our grubstake, old man. We've none too much, if the Babiche doesn't turn up according to schedule."

"Probably we won't see any more of him. He'll be gone by the morning."

He was gone with the morning. But as day followed weary day, and there was still no sign of the lakes narrowing to the long-sought river, Barrett was increasingly conscious that the old man was close upon their trail. Sometimes, in the brief radiance of the September dawns, he would see, far and far behind on the wrinkled silver water, a warped canoe paddling feebly. They always hauled away, by miles, from that decrepit canoe. But always, some time in the dark hours, it crept up again. Sometimes, he would see, in the sunset, a wavering thread of smoke arising from the site of their last-camp-but-one. It irritated him at last; the thought of that ragged, cranky canoe, paddled by the ragged, dirty, old imbecile, forever following them—creeping, creeping, under the great gaunt stars, creeping, creeping, under the flying dawns, the stormy moons; when he found Lemaire leaving little scraps of precious tobacco, a pinch of flour in a screw of paper, or a fresh-caught fish beside the trodden ashes of their cooking-place, he exploded.

"I can't help it," Lemaire apologized, "I *know* I'm all kinds of a fool, Barrett. But the poor old wretch is nearly blind—from long-ago smallpox, I should think. He can't catch things for himself much."

Barrett, aware that wisdom was on his side, yet felt sorry for his explosion. He said nothing more. Soon he forgot the matter, having much else to think about.

For the Lost Babiche, the once-discovered river, did not "turn up according to schedule."

The chain of lakes they had been following turned due south. They left them, and, after a terrible portage, launched the canoe in a stream that ran west. Here their progress was very slow, for there were rapids, and consequent portages, every mile or so. This stream, instead of feeding

another lake, died out in impassable quaking mosses. They saw a range of low hills some four or five miles ahead; so again they left the canoe and struck out for them on foot, half-wading, half-walking. It was exhausting work. At last they climbed the barren spurs and saw beyond, under a flaring yellow sunset, a world of interlacing waterways, unvisited and unknown, that seemed then as if they smoked under the vast clouds and spirals of wildfowl settling homeward to the reeds. The two men watched that wonderful sight in silence.

At last, "They're gathering to go south," said Lemaire briefly. And Barrett answered, "D'you know what date it is? It's the day on which we said we'd turn back if we hadn't found the Lost Babiche. It's the fifteenth of September."

"Well. . . are we going back?"

"Not till we've found our river," cried Barrett, with half a laugh and half a curse. They gripped hands, smiling rather grimly. They made a miserable, fireless camp, and went back the next day, carrying canoe and supplies, in four toilsome trips, across the hills; repacking and relaunching the second day on a new lake, where in all probability no white man—but one—had ever before dipped paddle.

They had been in the wilderness so long that they had fallen into the habit of carrying on conversations as if the lapse of two or three days had been as many minutes. Barrett knew to what Lemaire referred when he said abruptly, "After all, it isn't as if you were ignorant of the risks."

"I guess I know just as much about them as you," said Barrett, cheerily. "We're taking chances on the grub, aren't we? If we find the Lost Babiche before the game moves, we'll be alright, though our own supplies won't take us there. Once there, Bob, we're pretty sure to find friendly Indians when we link up with the Silver Fork—which we do seventy miles down the P'tite Babiche if your grandpa's map's correct. Well there are a good many 'if's' in the programme, but don't you worry. We'll get through or out, somehow. There's always fish. I've a feeling that this country *can't* go back on a Lemaire!"

They went on to a pleasant camp that night on a sandy

islet overgrown with dwarf willow, and a wild-duck supper. The current of these new lakes went west with such increasing strength that Lemaire thought they were feeling the "pull" of some big river into which the system drained; and if so, it could be no river but the lost Babiche. They slept, all a-tingle with the fever of discovery and re-made maps in their dreams.

Behind them many miles, a wandering smoke arose from the ashes of their last camp. The old Indian, about whom they had almost forgotten, had gained on them while they packed their supplies over the hills. Now he was close upon them again.

The life of that old savage seemed thin and wavering as the smoke of the fire he made. All night he sat in the ashes, motionless as a stone. Only once, just before the fierce dawn, he rose to his feet with an inarticulate cry, stirred to some instinctive excitement. For in a moment the vast, chill dusk was filled with a musical thrill, a tremendous clamour and rush of life, as thousand by thousand after their kinds, teal and widgeon, mallard and sheldrake, lifted from the reeds and fled before the coming cold. As the old man dimly watched, two delicate things fell and touched his face; one was a feather, the second was a flake of snow.

In those few delicate flakes, Lemaire and Barrett seemed to feel for the first time the ever-present hostility of nature; with such a brief, exquisite touch were they first made aware of the powers against which they strove. The new waterways seemed to stretch interminably. Each time they cleared one of the deep-cut channels which linked lake with lake as regularly as a thread links beads, they looked ahead with the same question. Each time they saw the same expanse of gray water, low islets, barren shores; the country passed them changing and unchanging as a dream. They seemed to be moving in a dream, conscious of nothing but the pressure of the current on their paddles.

Then came the mist.

It shut them into a circle ten feet wide, a pearl-white prison. Outside the circle were shadows, wandering voices, trees as men walking. For two days they felt their way westward through this fog; two nights they shivered over

a damp-wood fire, hearing nothing but water beading and dripping everywhere with a sound of grief. It strangely broke Lemaire's steel nerve. On the second night he said, restlessly, "We must turn back to-morrow."

"Bob!"

He flung out a tanned hand passionately. "I know. . . . But can't you feel it? Things have turned against us. These things." He pointed at the veiled sky, the milky water. "I daren't go on. If we don't find the river to-morrow, we'll go back. And then. . . . the land will have done for me what it never did for my grandfather."

"What, Bob, old fellow?"

"Beaten me," said Lemaire, and rolled into his blankets without another word.

He woke next morning with the touch of clear sunlight on his eyelids. He leaped to his feet silently, without waking Barrett, and as he did so, ice broke and tinkled like glass where the edge of the blankets had lain in a little pool of moisture. The last of the fog was draining in golden smoke from the low, dark hills. He strode to the edge of the water, and stopped, shaking suddenly as if he were cold. Then he went to Barrett, and stooped over him.

"Hullo, Bob, is it morning?" Then, as he saw Lemaire's face, "My God, what is it?"

Twice Lemaire tried to speak. Then he pointed eastward to three high rocky islands which lay across the water, exactly spaced, like the ruined spans of a great bridge which once had stretched from shore to shore.

"Barrett," he said huskily, "We entered the Lost Babiche yesterday in the fog, and never knew. Those islands are ten miles down the river on Forbes Lemaire's map."

They faced each other in silence, too much moved to speak. Their hands met in a long grip. Then Barrett said suddenly, "Anything else."

"Yes. It's freezing hard."

"But. . . we've won, Bob, we've won!"

"Not yet," said the man whose fathers had been bred in the wilderness, and wed to it. "Not yet. It's still against us."

But there was no talk now of turning back.

The Lost Babiche—lost no more—was a noble river ; a gray and ice-clear stream winding in generous curves between high cliffs of slate-coloured rock. These cliffs were much cut into ravines and gullies, where grew timber of fine size for that country. But as their tense excitement lessened a little, they were struck by the absence of all life ; even in the deep rock-shadows they saw no fish. Of human life there was not a sign ; though in Forbes Lemaire's days the country had supported many Indians. And now—"Not a soul but ourselves," said Barrett, in an awed voice ; "not a living soul. . ."

Yes. One soul yet living. Far behind them, in the staggering old canoe, the old Indian paddled valiantly on their trail. But he had forgotten them now, as they had long forgotten him. He stopped no more for the offal of their camps. A stronger instinct even than that of hunger was drawing him on the way they also went ; down the Lost Babiche. Had they looked, they would not have seen him. And soon, between him and them, the clouds which had been gathering all day dropped a curtain of fine snow.

The first sting of the tiny balled flakes on his knuckles was to Lemaire like the thunder of guns, the opening of a battle.

He had no need to speak to Barrett. They bent over the paddles and the canoe surged forward. It was a race ; a race between the early winter and themselves. If the cold weather set in so soon, if they found no Indians on the little-known Silver Fork—there were a dozen "ifs" in their minds as, mile after mile, they fled down the P'tite Babiche. Even as they fled from the winter, so that other white man long ago had fled from the sickness ; seen those stark bluffs unrolling ; viewed perhaps those very trees.

They made a record distance that day. "We're winning, Bob, we're winning," said Barrett over the fire that night. Lemaire had not the heart to contradict him ; but Lemaire's instincts, inherited from generations, told him that the wilderness was still mysteriously their enemy. He sat smoking, silent, hearing nothing but the faint, innumerable hiss of the snowflakes falling into the flames.

The snow was thickening in the morning, and by noon a

bitter wind arose, blowing in their faces and against the stream. Soon the canoe was smack-smack-smacking on the waves, and the snow was driving almost level. The continual pressure of wind and snow drugged their senses. They never heard the voice of the rapids until, rounding an abrupt bend, the ravelled water seemed to leap at them from under the very bow of the canoe.

There was only one thing to be done, and—"Let her go!" yelled Lemaire, crouching tense as a spring above the steering paddle.

Now for the trained eye, the strong hand—the eye to see the momentary chance, the hand to obey without a falter.

Now for the sleeping instincts of a brain inherited from far generations of wanderers and voyageurs. Flash on flash of leaping water, the drive of spray and snow, the canoe staggering and checking like a thing hurt, but always recovering.

Barrett, in the bows, paddled blindly. His life lay in Bob Lemaire's hands, and he was content to leave it there during those roaring moments. But those hands failed—by an inch.

They were in smooth water. Barrett would have paused to take breath, but Lemaire's voice barked at him from the stern. He obeyed. The canoe drove forward again—forward in great leaps, towards the point of a small island ahead, dimly seen through the snow—something wrong, though, thought Barrett, grunting; he could get no "beef" on the thing—it dragged; you'd have thought Bob was paddling against him. Then, suddenly, he understood. He called up the last of his strength, drove the paddle in, once, twice—again—heard a shout, flung himself overside into water waist-deep, and just as the canoe was sinking under them, he and Lemaire caught it and ran it ashore. Then, dripping, they looked each other in the face, and each seemed to see the face of disaster.

"It was a rock," said Lemaire at last, very quietly, "a few inches below the surface. It has almost cut the canoe in two."

"What's to be done?"

"Find shelter, I suppose."

They were very quiet about it. There was no shelter on

their islet but a few rocks and a dead spruce in the middle. Here they set up their tent as a wind-break. It was bitterly cold; the island was sheathed with white ice, for the spray from the rough water froze now as it fell; everything in the canoe was wet; they were wet to their waists. They tried to induce the dead tree to burn, but the wood was so rotted with wet it only smouldered and went out. They had a little cooking-lamp and a few squares of compressed fuel for it; they lighted this, and Lemaire made tea with numbed hands. It renewed the life in them, but could not dry them. They huddled against the little lamp in silence, waiting—waiting.

After some time Lemaire heard a curious sound from Barrett; his teeth were chattering. Lemaire saw that his face had taken a waxy white hue. He spoke to him, and Barrett looked up, but his eyes were dim and glazed. "It'll be all right," he said, thickly, "we'll get through, somehow. I've a feeling that this country can't go back on a Lemaire."

They were the first symptoms of collapse. Lemaire groaned. He got to his feet, and staggered across the slippery rocks. He shook his fist in the implacable face of the desolation. He shouted, foolish rage and defiance, caught back at his sanity; shouted again. . . . This time he thought he heard a faint cry in the snow. It whipped him back to self-control. He splashed out into the curdling shallows, shouting desperately.

Out of the gray drive of snow loomed the ghost of a canoe; paddled, as it seemed, by a ghost. It was the old Indian, whom Lemaire had long forgotten; the weather had not hindered him, the rapids had not wrecked him. At Lemaire's cry he raised his head, and the canoe put inshore, waveringly. Lemaire splashed to meet it, met the incurious gaze of the half-blind old eyes under the scarred lids, and read into the wrinkled, foul old face, a sort of animal kindness.

Five minutes later he was desperately trying to rouse Barrett. Barrett looked at him at last, and Lemaire saw that the brief delirium was past. "What is it, Bob?" he asked, weakly. And Lemaire broke into a torrent of words.

"The old Indian—the old Indian you said was a hoodoo—don't you remember? He's here. He has caught us up, —

God knows how. He says his canoe'll hold three. He says that a very little way on there's a big camp, and that he'll take us there—in a very little while. He says his tribe is always kind to strangers, to white men. . . . I can't make out all he says, he's queer in his head. But he's dead sure of the encampment. He says it's always there. . . "

Still talking eagerly, Lemaire snatched together a few things, got an arm round Barrett, lifted him up to his feet, got him reeling to the canoe, laid him in the bottom, and helped the old Indian push off. There was no second paddle. There was no need of it. The current took them at once.

The cold was increasing, as the wind died and the snow thinned. Lemaire ceased to be conscious of the passing of time, but within himself the stubborn life burned; he was strongly curious to know the end, to discover what it was the wilderness had in store for him after five years, to read the riddle of that relationship with himself which had called him from the cities to this.

He was aware, at last, of a vast, golden light. The clouds were parting behind the snow, and the sunset was gleaming through. It turned the snow into a mist of rose and molten gold. The old Indian feebly turned the canoe. It crept toward the shore.

"The lodges of my people," muttered the old Indian. He stood erect, and pointed with his bleached paddle. "They are very many—a very strong tribe."

Lemaire also looked, and saw.

Silently, the canoe took the half-frozen sand. Silently, very slowly, Lemaire stepped out. The old Indian waited for him. It seemed that the whole world was waiting for him.

He, like a man in a dream, moved slowly into the midst of a level stretch of sand, and stood there. All about him, covering the whole level, were the ridgepoles of wigwams, but the coverings had long fallen away and rotted, and the sunset glowed through the gaunt poles. Lemaire stretched out his hand, and touched the nearest; they fell into dust and rot. . . . Under his feet he crushed the bones of the dead—the dead, who had died fifty years before, and had waited for him here ever since, under the blown sand and

the ground willows " They've a song about it, down along the Lamennais. For of all that tribe, only one family, they say, escaped. All the others died they died like flies, they died in heaps. And over the bones of the dead the tepees stood for years No one ever went to that place any more. It was cursed because of my grandfather"

He went back to the canoe. Whining like an old animal, the old Indian was busied above Barrett. " The lodges of my people," he muttered, " a very strong tribe, and kind to the white men."

Very gently, Lemaire put aside the blind old hands that touched Barrett's unconscious face. " Don't wake him," he said.



THE GIRL ON THE OTHER SIDE



THE GIRL ON THE OTHER SIDE

AS Dick Lewis went up the steps, the front door opened and old Jaffray's moved face showed against the dark of the hall. Lewis noticed, with his new and wondering appreciation for the beauty of common things, that it was finely carved as ivory against the shadow. Then, he was shaking the old man's hand.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Lewis. Glad from my 'eart, sir, if you'll allow me. We were all very glad to hear of your safety. Miss Guida, she's waiting for you. . . Yes, in the library, sir."

"Thank you, Jaffray."

He went to the familiar door and opened it, and the woman who had been sitting for an hour listening for his step and the sound of the opening door, rose and went forward swiftly to meet him. She said only "Dick!" Then, as they clasped hands: "I need not tell you our joy and relief when we heard."

"Thank you, Guida. You had my letter?"

"Yes, I kept it to myself—greedy me! The others don't know you're here yet. And you've come—?"

"Just on my way back. To say good-bye."

She smiled, summoning that light speech so many use for a shield and buckler. "Don't! No good-byes between friends! I shall say 'Au 'voir' as usual."

But he did not respond to her mood. He said gently, "I think good-bye—and all it stands for—is a good thing to say between friends." And instantly something alert and frightened stood up in the woman's soul, crying "He's changed, he's different. Something's happened. This is not Dick. . ."

She met his eyes, resting on her with a sort of abstract delight. From her pale crinkled hair to her slender feet, she

was good for eyes to rest on ; many eyes had told her so. But Dick Lewis seemed for the first time to see her at a very far distance ; and the dumb fear at her heart spread to her body, so that she pressed her hands hard together to prevent them shaking.

" I—want to hear about your escape, Dick," she said aloud.

There was a long pause. At last he turned to her with a simplicity as strange as it was new. " And I—want to tell you, Guida. I—came to tell you. But I don't quite know how to do it without hurting you." His eyes were infinitely kind. " You've been so good to me, you see."

She looked at him. " Don't think of me," she said clearly ; " I knew from your letter there was something you wanted to tell me. Don't think of me, except that I want to listen. And always want to—help, if I can. . . Wait till I get settled comfy. There. Go on."

He leaned forward and touched her hand an instant. " You're a dear," he said, rather huskily ; " you've been listening to my tales for—five years or so, isn't it ? Well, listen to the last. Your friendship's been the best thing those five years have known."

Her eyes were like steel as she said with careful lightness, " But why speak of it in the past tense, Richard ?"

He was silent ; she felt his kindness reaching out to her as he had reached his hand ; a kindness somehow pitiful. At last he said quietly, " Because—this time—I believe it really will be good-bye, Guida. I don't think I shall come back."

" You mean. . . ?"

His eyes met hers, gravely, across that strange distance. " I mean—if there's any justice, or any mercy, in earth or heaven, I *can't* come back."

She said at once. " You'll have to tell me the whole thing. You owe me that."

" Yes, I owe you that. . . and so much more ! If only I can make you understand. . ."

Sheer fright was sickening her. A hundred broken words beat on her bewildered mind. Exposure—shock—could his brain be affected ? That small crying voice repeated over and over, " What is it, O, what is it ? What's happened to him ?

What does it mean?" She did not know she had spoken the last words aloud till he answered them.

"I mean only that I believe, this time, I shan't come back, my dear."

"But you've come through safely—come through everything—up till now!"

He smiled at her affectionately from his far distance. "O, I don't mean warnings or presentiments, or any of that rot! I mean a reasoned assurance that I am not to survive the war."

She managed a smile also. "You look—very much alive, Dick!"

"Yes." He was looking at her very straightly. "But you see—it's not my own life. It's just on loan for a time. That's the way I look at it."

She heard her own voice saying, "You must try to make me understand, Dick." He answered at once, "I'll try, Guida."

"You know all the newspaper part of it. You know the ship was torpedoed without warning; that she sank in eight minutes; that the sea was so rough only three boats were launched safely? Yes? Well, you know as much of that part of it as I do, then. For I fell when she heeled to the explosion, and either struck my head, or was struck by something. I remember nothing till I found myself fighting upwards out of the sea; not much then; I was pretty far gone. . . 'All Thy waves and billows are gone over me.' You've read that. So had I. But it's a strange thing to *feel* it.

"I was swimming by instinct when I came to myself. My head felt as if it was split in two, and I could scarcely see, what with dizziness and salt water. But there was some sort of wreckage floating near, and I made for it. It was one of those collapsible canvas boats. I don't know where it came from. It was floating bottom up and crumpled. The air caught under it, made it float like a buoy, but it gave a bit with my weight. Then I saw that there was someone else clinging to the other side of it. A girl.

"I was quite in possession of myself, but awfully sick and shaken. I said 'Will it bear two, d'you think?' And she said, 'Yes, rather. Can you get hold of it?'

"I got hold of it after a fashion. My hands didn't seem to belong to me. She watched me across the keel with some anxiety. I misread this, and said, 'I'll just rest here a bit, if you don't mind, and then I'll swim off and find something else. She said at once, 'Please don't. If we keep the gunwale under each side, the air won't leak out so much. It kept bobbing up before you came. You're a soldier, aren't you? I saw you on board.'

"I said, Yes, I was a soldier; wounded, sent south, and just on my way back. Couldn't say I'd noticed her on board, for I hadn't. I noticed her now, though. She was quite young; her hair was tied in a sopping tail at the back of her neck, schoolgirl fashion, her face was fair, rather square, perfectly calm, and streaming, I thought at first with seawater. Then I saw it was with tears. She saw me look at her and said at once, 'There were children on board, you know. I was playing with them this morning. Jolly lucky for us that it's not cold, and that we can both swim.' I said, Yes, jolly lucky. . ."

He stopped. He was silent so long that the woman listening stirred and drew a long breath like a sob. He looked at her quickly. "You and I," he went on in a low voice, "we've talked so much of life and . . . death, and what death means. And there, with that girl, nearer to it than I'd ever been before, I hadn't a thought or a word different to what you'd have at five o'clock tea! She talked a good deal—rather off-hand and slangy like a boy—of a safety-waistcoat and a certain Miss Matthews. 'We'd only one,' she said, 'and of course, I put it on Miss Matthews, and she sat up all night in it, reading Gold Dust. . . Beastly little books.' She said, when did I think we'd be picked up? And I said 'O, any moment.' though I'd the greatest doubts if we'd be picked up at all. Then wave after wave of pain and sickness came over me. My head was on fire. I thought I must let go. But I hung on; really because I didn't want to leave the girl alone. . . When I came out of 'em, she—she comforted me. How? O, I don't know. She just said 'Stick to it. O *do* stick to it! You can manage it a bit longer, and a ship is sure to turn up.' So I kept on managing it a bit longer.

"I'd have done better to let go then.

"Once, though, I must have fainted or something. I came to, and she had swum round, and was supporting me. I don't know what I said, but she dived back to the other side like a fish. 'Jolly lucky,' she told me, 'that I went in for swimming. I've two cups.' We talked about the cups, I remember; and that Miss Matthews had thought it unladylike to choose cups when you might have had teaspoons instead.

"We must have been two hours in the water. My God! such hours! Not that we suffered much. But that passive *waiting* was so strange. It called for every ounce of endurance in soul and body; I've never felt such a strain on me, even in the trenches. And she—that girl—bore it, and better than I. . ."

He was silent again. Guida listened to the ticking of a little French clock, whose pendulum was a gilded Love swinging on a wreath of roses. Presently it sounded a small ringing chime; and a peal beaten by iron hammers in a hundred towers could not have been more remorseless than the fairy sound.

"From first to last we saw nothing of the other boats, nor of any other survivors. The sea seemed to have been swept clear, even of the tragedy. I did see one smear of smoke on the horizon, but would not draw her attention to it, and it quickly passed.

"I roused from a sort of doze—if it's possible to doze clinging to an upturned boat, with a broken head. The sky seemed lower and darker. The waves seemed to run against it. It was a funny effect. I expected them to splash and flop back! We were very low in the sea. I thought the boat we clung to was lower. And evening was coming on. Our last hope, I thought, would go with the day. . .

"I looked across the keel. That brave child's face was very pale. Her mouth was set in such resolution it made her look old. She said quietly. 'The air's leaking out of the boat.'

"Not a thing could I do or say to help her! I don't hold it's any part of a man's duty to throw dust in the eyes of a

plucky girl facing danger ; but I *did* long to be able to ease it a bit for her. And beyond what comfort the mere presence of another human being gave her, I was utterly useless. However, something in her face made me think she'd have been worse off alone, and I resolved to cling on to the last possible moment. But I was very weak and drowsy. I'd have let go and given up if it hadn't been for her.

" 'If it sinks any lower,' I told her, 'you must work round to the stern and cling on there, and I'll swim alongside.' I knew I shouldn't swim far ; but I thought the thing would serve to keep her head out of the water for another couple of hours, anyway. And then she leaned a little forward and said 'No !'

" 'You must,' I said. But she went on quite quietly, 'No. If this boat will only support one—if only one of us is to be saved—then it must be you.'

" I laughed. I was very angry with her—with that small, steady, white face of hers. I said, 'Don't talk nonsense, if you please. It's all quite bad enough without that. You'll do as you're told.' I suppose I was awfully rude to her. . . . But she made me listen.

" 'That's all right,' she said, in her boyish way, 'when other things are all right. But everything's upside down now. Nothing is as usual. You know what I mean. And of the two, you *must* be saved, if there's a choice. Just *because* of—of women and children. Just *because* you're a man, and can fight, and help to stop—this. Don't you see ? Can't you see ?'

" I talked a lot more—talked like a Dutch Uncle. We argued the rights and wrongs of it for ever so long. It must have been. . . funny. . . we two specks of human beings, talking like that in the middle of the Atlantic ! Her arguing was not the least use, of course. She to argue down the deepest instinct in the nature of any decent man of our race—she, that little thing ! She was silent at last. I thought I'd convinced her of the sheer, rank, outrageous impossibility of her idea. And all the time I was longing to give in and let go there and then. Only I read in her face—somehow ; how does one know things at such times ?—that her one fear was just being left alone. She wasn't

afraid of death; but she *was* afraid of the gray twilight and the empty, empty sea.

"We did not speak for a long time after that. We were too tired. That wild suggestion of hers never crossed my mind again. I was thinking,—chiefly of going ratting with Gherkin, the terrier I left with the Dunstables! I was in a sort of dream, I think. But once I heard her speak, low and clearly. 'Hold on,' she said, 'hold on. Stick it out! It's your duty. You're not your own now. You belong to every weak and defenceless thing there is in the world. . . ' I didn't quite take in what she said, or its meaning; I was too far gone. But I lifted my head—I was resting it against the bulge of the broken canvas keel—and nodded to her, and she nodded back at me. I remembered afterwards that her eyes were starry bright. . . Then I let my head go down again, and shut my eyes a minute. . . "

He turned slowly, so that he faced Guida full. She saw, with an indescribable wrench of pain, that his brown cheeks were glistening wet; and as she saw it, he wiped the tears away, openly, on his knuckles, like a child. His eyes, looking into hers, held the reflection of a great light. And he was miles away; separated from her by measureless emotion, as by time and space.

He said, quite steadily, "I never saw her again.

"When I remember anything more, I was in the vast blaze of a searchlight—an agony of light, it seemed to me, boring through me. Then there were black shapes of men, trying to lift me into a boat. My hands were so clenched and numbed on the gunwale of that canvas thing that they had to cut free the bits I was hanging on to. . . for fear I left the girl in the lurch. And I shouted to them 'Have you got the lady? Have you got the young lady? Take her first!' And one of them put his ear down to my mouth, and listened carefully, and then looked at the others. And he said, very gently, 'There ain't no young lady, sir. You're the only one on that boat.' "

Pity rushed over the frozen woman in the chair; pity, warm and blinding. "O, the poor child!" she said, "O, the poor child!"

But Lewis swung on her almost angrily. "Don't pity

her," he said at once. "There's nothing to pity in such a royal sort of generosity as hers! She and her gift are not to be pitied. Don't waste pity on—either of us, Guida."

Meeting her dumb, bewildered look, after a moment he went on, "If I'm sure of anything, in earth or heaven, I'm sure that she gave her life for mine—that she let go her hold on that boat deliberately—to give me a better chance—because she thought mine the more useful life."

"You can't be *sure*, my poor Dick!"

"But I am sure. She was in better case to stick to that boat than I was. She gave me my life—no, lent it!—the divine, unpardonable child. . . She lent it, in her own words, to all the weak things of the world, because I could fight on their side till such deeds as *that* were done away. I take it so. I believe I am—meant to take it so. It's not my own life any more. It's a loan, till the end of justice has been reached—the end we all have fought for, she not less than I, God knows! And when that end's attained, I think God in His mercy will call in the debt—that He won't leave me under such a proud, intolerable, burden. . . What a lot we've talked about—things—before. And here, I suppose, is the strangest thing of all. Only it doesn't seem strange to me. Just natural. One didn't exactly run away from. . . death. . . before, you know. The difference now is only that, when I see it coming, I shall run to meet it."

She could find no relief in thought or feeling. He sat quite still in his pet chair, the traces of those unashamed tears still on his cheeks, staring at the rug; and as she watched him, she saw a terror opening before her, a gray desolation. The familiar room, the afternoon sunlight in squares on the carpet, the faint rattle of a wind-stirred blind—all the old familiar things were there. But in the half of an hour, the soul of them was changed past any recall of hers.

She tried once, timidly, desperately, "But if she *gave* it to you. . ."

He answered quickly, "For that! Just for that. I shall have no right to the loan any longer." He looked at her quietly. And she spoke, answering something his eyes had said rather than his lips.

"I see. And nothing I can say will make you look at it differently. . ."

"No. I don't think it will, Guida. I've had a long time to think things out, you see."

The familiar room, the familiar figure, Guida saw them as in a glass darkly. She knew it was no use fighting. Something confronted her which was implacable by words or tears or prayers; implacable as death, yet wearing the bright face of life and love.

He was watching her, with infinite kindness, from that great and starry distance. "I didn't do wrong to tell you, did I?" he asked gently. "There was more or less of an unspoken compact—we always talked out our philosophies. How thin they seem—now. . . . And I thought you wouldn't—grieve—when it comes. . . . If I could show you that grief was—would be—out of place."

She bent her head and after a minute asked calmly, "when do you go?"

"This evening." And afterwards she could remember no interval between his saying so and his rising to go. A few more brief sentences, broken words of courage that were on a thousand lips; then he was at the door, turning with a smile. She did not press him to stay. Life was going with him; but better it should go, she thought. She knew afterwards that he had held her hands, kissed her once, and blessed her for "the truest friend ever man had." But all the time their souls were divided by a barrier of great and shining things in which she had no share.

"Good-bye, Guida."

"No, Dick, no! Au 'voir!"

For a moment that light seemed to include her as she defied it, to shine on her too. Then it was gone with him, and the door closed.

She stayed quiet, as she was, for a long time; then she slid forward slowly to the floor and knelt there, her face in her hands. Later she rose, and went to a glass, and mercilessly examined her beauty.

"A little while, my dear," she said, "a little while, and you'll be old. And lonely. . . . Would it have made any difference if you'd told Dick you loved him?"

"Would it have made it seem *happier* to Guida," Dick Lewis was asking himself, "if I could have told her that I'll be not only willing, but glad—eager—to go, for the sake of the one chance in a thousand that I'll find that girl again—the girl whose name I never knew—the girl on the other side?"

THE DISTANT DRUMS



THE DISTANT DRUMS

WAR broke out in August, 1914, as everyone knows. In the October of that same memorable year, Garry Redmond, descending from the Far-alone country to the comparative civilisation of the All-alone, found in the possession of John Akkamuk a bottle, with a scrap of newspaper stuck to it.

Squatting in the thick murk of John Akkamuk's winter house, Garry lifted the bottle to the lamplight, and read the paper.

"You give me this, John?" he suggested.

John thought his white friend had gone mad; but then, he often thought so.

"Yes," he said, "you have him. You good feller." He had just struck an excellent bargain with Garry over a loon-skin rug, and felt generous.

Garry pulled out of his pocket a tiny canvas bag, from which he shook into his broad palm a glittering fairy pyramid of gold dust.

"Where you get that?" asked John, leaning forward.

Garry grinned at him, happily.

"Ne'er mind, my simple heathen," said he. "I'll get lots more of it next summer. This is just a free sample; but I'll give it to you right now if you can find me the bit that's tore off this paper."

"No go," said John, gloomily. He had never had any more of the paper than that piece stuck on the bottle. Garry took the bottle and the loon-skin rug home with him, and when he had gone, John turned to and beat his wives, one after the other, out of sheer vexation.

Garry's home that winter was a one-roomed shack, lined with skins, buried to the roof in earth, gravel, turf—anything that would keep the winds out. It was built on the

clean rock, because if you built on the earth, the whole thing was likely to collapse in sludge, after the stove had been lighted long enough to melt the ice under the earth. There was not room in the shack for much but the stove, two bunks, and some soapstone lamps that the Inniut use.

Kob Smit was lying in one of the bunks. He turned his head, with a dim smile, as Garry entered. The whole of him was dimmed, sapped, whitened, like a plant that's been away from the light too long. Weeks earlier he had fallen on the rocks, and had been ill since. He had a hard time of it, fighting out from the Far-alone. Now he was "resting up," in the midst of every luxury to be had north of sixty-five; for next summer was to bring the partners luck at last.

"This is for you, Kob," said Garry, flinging the lovely feather rug over his feet. "It'll keep you fine and warm."

"It'll keep me fine and warm," agreed Kob, nodding and smiling. He had a gentle, docile voice, like a big child's. "You're a good feller, Garry. Always white to me."

"What d'you make of this?" Garry wished to change the subject, and thrust the bottle forward where Kob could see it. Kob frowned at the blurred words, reading them out almost letter by letter.

"Eng—land De—clares War—" he read. Then, with a sudden, mild brightening: "Well, say, Garry, that's quite interesting, ain't it? 'England Declares War.' But it don't say who with, eh, Garry?"

"No, it don't," said Garry. "You wait now, Kob; I'm just goin' to fix you up some broth."

"You're awful good to me, Garry."

Garry took the bottle away and hid it under his bunk. But Kob talked a lot about the scrap of newspaper.

"My father," said Kob, "he fought in a war over there, somewheres. He'd got a wound, too."

Garry did not talk of it again. But, sometimes when Kob was asleep, he pulled the bottle out from under his bunk, and read the message on it over and over. Once Kob woke in the night, and saw Garry standing over him.

"What's your real name, Kob?" said Garry.

"Yawcob Schmidt, I guess. But are you crazy, Garry?"

"No," said Garry. "Hush up! Sleep!"

"Well," Garry told himself, "I'll know in the spring. Maybe it ain't anything, either."

He settled down to the interminable monotony of wintering north—not his first experience. What to another and softer breed of men would have been a hardship and desolation unspeakable, he half-unconsciously enjoyed. It was in this environment in which all his qualities of body and soul, having freest range, came to their finest, stoic fruition. He loved the first storms out of the Arctic, heralded by their clanging clouds of wildfowl; the rare days of clear sun, when the sky was a turquoise, and the *poudre* played its magic with the hills; track of wolf and hare and caribou among the low birch scrub for his following. And the nights—above all, the nights—when the earth was a star glittering under the icy fires of the universe unveiled. All these things he had loved, without knowing. That winter he began to know.

One night, he went swinging home on snowshoes, carrying a string of fish frozen stiff as platters. He'd been fishing through the ice on a small lake, sitting in the buckle, as he had been taught by the natives of a yet farther north. It was so cold the air seared like heat, but he liked it. He liked such a murderous night, that he might battle with it; he liked to pit the heat of his generous blood against that cold; the courage of his generous heart against the loneliness more fatal than hunger; the strength of his limbs against those aching distances—and win. He had been satisfied with those noble, homely endurances. He was so no longer.

On the way he turned into John Akkamuk's.

"You got the rest of that paper yet, John?"

"Me no got'm," said John, sourly.

Garry turned to go, but paused, and asked idly after the dogs. Were there any good dogs to be had—say, round the Backs? No, only pups. All the grown sledge-dogs were dead of the sickness. Maybe the Montagnais at Moon River might have some. Garry crawled out, not stopping to argue that the Montagnais only had curs.

Once home, he thawed out the fish in the frying-pan. He was silent and very thoughtful. After he had served

Kob and helped himself, he brought out the bottle, and sat holding it in both hands, reading and re-reading that unfinished message. At last, he stood up with a long sigh, stretching both arms above his head. He held them so a minute, still thinking. When he lowered his arms, he had made up his mind. He went slowly to the bunk.

"Kob!"

Kob blinked up at him, full-fed and kindly.

"Kob, I got to find out about this here—about this war."

"Why, you'll know when things open up in the spring, Garry."

"I can't wait so long. I have to know now, Kob. I guess I'll have to make Fort Scarlett and—and find out."

Kob lay motionless, staring up at him, and into his mild, pale eyes fear suddenly leapt, alive and vivid.

"You'd go to Fort Scarlett—go an' leave me here like this—"

"No," said Garry, gently; "no, I won't leave you, Kob, and you know it. I'll take you along."

"You're *crazy*, Garry!"

"No, I ain't crazy. I—I *got* to know, Kob. There's a nice hospital at Fort Scarlett, Kob, where you could lay up."

"You'll never get me there—"

"Yes, I will, Kob; I'll get you there. I *got* to go—"

After a long silence, Kob said, fretfully:

"Well, if you *got* to go, I'll have to go, too." He waited for the brief grip of Garry's hand, which he somehow expected. But Garry was looking at him from a mental distance, very kindly. Seeing Kob's vexed, inquiring face, he said only, "I guess maybe it's them Boers again," and went out to the cache behind the shack.

Quietly, for four days, he made his preparations for the biggest job he had ever undertaken in his life—the job of getting Kob to Fort Scarlett, single-handed and without dogs. Like most of the very strong, he was ruthless in his purpose, but he was tenderly careful of Kob.

They started on the fifth day. Garry had left as little as possible to chance. The sledge was loaded with many things besides Kob, including two sealskin sleeping bags, a

tiny canvas shelter, a big lamp for cooking and heating, and food for ten days. He reckoned they could make Fort Scarlett in ten days. Kob was well below his normal weight, but even so, the load was over the two-hundred and fifty pounds, which is about the limit that a man can pull.

Daylight only lasted about five hours, but there was a moon half-way to the full ; the weather was clear and still—so still that there was not a sound to be heard save the shrieking runners as the sledge put out from the shack, like a small ship putting out from a familiar harbour into a trackless sea ; Kob whimpering a little under the furs, the strange late sun gilding the south, and the great stars lighting the rim of the grey northern snows.

That sea was not trackless to Garry. His young eyes, weather-wrinkled at the lids like an old man's, picked up this mark and that ; the wrinkle in the vast white plain that was a river-bed, and the low hills like a rampart, the wedge of spruce that drove to meet them like the vanguard of an army fronting the implacable north. He knew it, was at home here, soul and body. But now he felt a sudden pang of desolation at the thought of the trodden snow about the shack ; that ahead was untouched, unmarked. The north receives no impress from man but a few foot-prints in the ever-changing, eternal snow. For all his strength, that was the only mark he had made on this land.

" You quite warm, Kob ? "

Kob's voice came, weak and muffled.

" Well, I ain't exactly *warm*."

" You c'n feel your hands 'n' feet, Kob ? "

" Oh, yes, I feel 'em ! "

" That's all right." Garry slackened an instant, and shifted the sealskin band that ran from the traces around his chest. It would cut him, eventually, he knew, with that weight behind, in spite of the dried moss he had stuffed into his shirt. The sledge sped on again, swiftly ; the miles were marked by no more than the imperceptible advance of the spruce-belt and Garry's monotonous, careful questions : " You all right, Kob ? How's your feet, Kob ? Do you still feel your hands ? "

They made the edge of the trees that night under an

electric-white moon. The slope of the land had been in Garry's favour, and the going easy. He set up the tiny tent, packed Kob into the back of it, started the lamp, made tea and cooked pork; then himself slept across the opening, shielding Kob with the warmth of his own body, grimly satisfied. He wondered if he had not set up a new record for single-sledge travelling. Likely enough he had.

The next day was also clear and fair. Kob seemed stronger, and was remarkably cheerful; he sang, under the muffling furs, sang of "Rosalie, the Prairie Flower:"

" Fair as a lily,
Joyous and free ;
Light of the prairie
Home was she-ee."

But they made slower progress among the trees, thin though these were. They saw fox-tracks, and sighted a wolf in the distance. The second night was colder, but Garry collected dead wood, and coaxed a fire, and they were content. They woke to find that snow had fallen while they slept, to the depth of a couple of inches—no more. The clouds had gone, and the sun rose at last on a dazzling world. Before the second hour of daylight they had emerged from the narrow belt of trees and were once more in rolling, open country.

The third day was absolutely uneventful, still, brief, radiant. But the temperature dropped, and Kob's spirits seemed to fall with it. He complained of pains in his limbs; twice Garry had to stop, set up tent and stove, and warm him back to life. In Garry himself there was no change beyond a certain rigidity, a grim and watchful silence, that told the fight was on. He set up the tent that night in a hollow, scooped in a drift of deep snow. They were warm. But in the morning, tent and sleeping-bags were stiff as boards, all but impossible to stow on the sledge. The temperature was nearly forty below zero.

Again, there was no wind, not a cloud in the almost violet sky; nothing but a vast, white circle that enclosed them, seeming to move as they moved. Kob was quiet and drowsy. Garry's attention was focussed on him; so intense was his

care of Kob that there seemed to be some mysterious physical sympathy set up between them ; so that Garry knew when Kob's left foot was frozen before Kob did himself. It took Garry two hours to bring the foot round. They travelled on under a moon rounding to the full. Sometimes their shadows streamed ink-black behind them ; sometimes these shadows shot suddenly to the front, as the aurora blazed and shook gigantic spears that dimmed the moon. The rigidity in Garry became more noticeable. He went on untiring, but bought every mile at the price of that intense watchfulness. He did nothing but pull the sledge and care for Kob, in a single monotony of effort. And all the time he was fighting—fighting for all he was worth.

They camped for their fourth night under an outcrop of rock. Garry was very silent. He slept restlessly, and once or twice groaned in his sleep. Clouds rolled up from the south, covered the moon and the great arching stars, and the temperature rose immediately. But the North had struck at them.

They started in a soft, grey twilight, under those merciful low clouds, for the fifth day of Garry's fight. Kob was cheerful again with the rising temperature, sat up among his furs, and talked of Fort Scarlett, and how nice it would be to lie up in hospital.

" You does your best for me, Garry, and you're as white to me as a feller could be, but there's lots you can't do, stands to reason. Not but what you always does your best."

" Yes," said Garry, slowly, " I does my best for you."

" I know it, Garry. But there's lots you can't do. You're tired, Garry ? "

" No, Kob, I ain't tired."

Kob glanced at the great fur-clad limbs, tireless as machinery ; at the great shoulders bent to the yoke. A certain uneasiness stirred in him.

" You're going mighty slow, Garry——"

Suddenly, with a great, slow sigh, Garry stopped. He stood, arms folded on the yoke, head turned to the south, still as a rock.

" Kob ! "

" What's gettin' you, Garry ? "

"Kob, there should be a hill to the west, not a mile away—a hill breaking out o' the level like a cliff. Look and tell me if it's there."

As his voice ceased, the terrible silence closed in on them like iron, so that all the senses ached to its grip.

"Garry!"

"Yes, Kob?"

"Garry! My God! You don't mean—"

"I'm a'most blind, Kob. It's the sun and the new snow. I can make shift to see my feet—in a kind of red mist. No more. Is the hill there, Kob?"

The silence took them again, broken now by Kob, who screamed out like a woman.

"Oh God, oh God, we're done! You blind, and me sick! We'll die here. You'll never get me to Fort Scarlett! Oh, why didn't I stay at the shack, and die there?"

When he had done, Garry spoke, gently, almost gaily. Kob could not see the grey granite of his face.

"I passed you my word I'd get you to Fort Scarlett, Kob. You ain't found me break my word yet. I'll get you there. I ain't quite blind. No more'n a horse in blinkers. You'll have to be driver, Kob, and tell me where to go."

To all Kob's cries and curses, to all the wild utterances of a sick man's despair, he answered the same thing:

"I'll get you to Fort Scarlett, Kob, if you tell me where to go."

Noon, and a vast sun showing momentarily through the fleeing rack: found them going forward slowly, but steadily, Kob sitting erect in the sledge and shouting to the blinded Garry as a man shouts to his dog-team. Once and again Garry stopped, to feel Kob's flesh with his own bare hands, in fear of frostbite, to feed him, to wrap him more closely in the soft seal fur. He was fighting every foot of the way. Kob watched him, fear in his hollowed eyes; later, more than fear. He whispered:

"If it had not been for him, I'd 'a' been home now, I'd 'a' been safe."

"Can you see a big rock nor'-by-east, Kob?"

"Yes, I see it, not half of a mile away, Garry, hang you!"

"Then we're running true. Don't you worry, Kob. I'll

get you to the Fort. I passed you my word, Kob, didn't I? And have you ever known me go back on it?"

That day passed.

In the night Kob moaned and cursed. Garry said, "He's ill," and felt no blame for Kob, nor for himself. He crawled out of his bag and rubbed Kob's feet for an hour. Once he stopped suddenly; he thought the entrance to the tent darkened, and that John Akkamuk stood there, holding the torn bit of newspaper. He grabbed at it, and it was gone. The intense pain that accompanies snow-blindness was making Garry light-headed. But he took care of Kob just the same. He always had taken care of Kob.

The sixth day came, and Garry fought through it.

The sixth night he had no sleep. He wanted none. He was comforted with visions as with rest. The visions were always of himself and Kob; not the Kob who cursed and cried, but the old comrade Kob; they were washing gold together away back in the Far-alone; or speeding south to spend it, behind the finest team of huskies east of the Slave; or advancing together, shoulder to shoulder, to some unknown victory or unfear'd defeat. But always together.

The seventh day Garry began to see this old Kob, pulling beside him on the trace, as he had pulled a thousand times before. The new Kob, in the sledge, cursed him horribly, and threw bits of ice at him to make him go faster. In the night, Garry got up and heated tea for Kob, and softened bits of pork in it, and fed him. Kob complained of pains in the stomach, and Garry wrapped him in some of the blanket-strips he wore in his own larrigans. All the time the vision went on—strange, nameless events, and peopled starry spaces. But always Kob and himself together.

The eight day, Garry could barely see his own feet. He began to stumble and fall frequently. After one of these falls and slow recoveries, Garry thought the sledge ran light. He turned back to it, felt it over, and it was empty. On hands and knees he felt his way back along their trail; found Kob where he had fallen off in the snow, half delirious; carried him back to the sledge, wrapped him up, and tied him on with a spare trace. Blood was on Garry's parka; under it, his chest was cut to the bone, where the trace

pressed. But after this, he ceased to be conscious of even suffering.

He knew nothing until he found the sledge running light as a feather ; it might have been hours after, or days, or years. In a brief glimmer of sight, he saw a man beside him, pulling. A tall man, not Kob. His face turned to Garry, seemed gentle in the shadow of the parka hood. Old tales, old legends of lovely faith, returned to Garry Redmond ; like a child he leaned on the stranger.

In a certain blue-covered volume issued from Ottawa you will find, should you care to look, the report of Brant Durgan, Sergeant, R.N.W.M.P.

"I have the honour to report," wrote the sergeant, laboriously, among other things, "that on December 6th inst., coming into Fort Scarlett with Patterson, trooper, from the Southern Moon, I encountered a sledge party ten miles east of the Go-Soak, and about the same distance from the Fort. There were two men and one sledge. It was apparent, from a distance, that they were in difficulties. When I overhauled them it was to find one man ill and tied to the sledge, and the man who pulled it suffered from snow-blindness. Both being—('batty' was crossed out in the original)—both being delirious from exhaustion and exposure, we assisted them to the Fort."

That is all you will find. Some while after the report had gone in, Garry opened his eyes. He was in a comfortable room, in a comfortable cot, under a red H.B.C. blanket. There is an H.B.C. post at Fort Scarlett, and a medical mission, and nearly twenty houses. It's a great place. The medical missionary, who had been busy for three weeks saving Garry's sight, and his feet, and his life, came in and looked at him ; Garry grinned anxiously.

"I got him here ? " he said.

"You did," said the missionary, who was a man of few words, but those generally the right ones. "You got him in on your own, except the last few miles. He's all right. Like to see him ? "

"No, not yet," answered Garry, after a silence. "I'd like to see the latest paper you got first, please."

"For five minutes," said the missionary, looking at his eyes. But when the paper came, it only took Garry about two seconds to find out. He knew. Like a man of old, he turned his face to the wall.

He knew that never would he and Kob march shoulder to shoulder to any defeat or victory. Kob would never pull beside him on any trace; never work with him, drink with him, quarrel with him. It was all over. The great gulf was fixed. The war reached out and touched him already, to his hurt. He would not be taking care of Kob any more. Never again would Britisher and German share the same shack.

In the spring, when he was healed, Garry went down to Winnipeg, and enlisted. Away back in the All-alone, the sun melted the trodden snow about the shack. And a little mouse got in and nibbled all the morsels of newspaper off the broken bottle.



THE PRISONER



THE PRISONER

THE car was hopelessly dislocated, that was evident ; when Berry started the engine, it clucked like a dying hen for a few revolutions, and failed. He was minded to waste no more time on it. He stowed the contents of the tool-box mysteriously about his person, hid the spare can of petrol in the ditch, and departed to find his bearings, and, if possible, a warm barn to sleep in. Once he looked back at the car. " You look lorst, old girl," said Berry, " but you aint 'arf so lorst and lonesome as me."

There are degrees of lostness. Private Berry was lost in the superlative degree—utterly, hopelessly, intensively. It was one o'clock in the morning and cold. The moon was up, so round and white, it reminded him of a peeled onion but persistently in the wrong quarter of the sky. He sighed. He had with him a tin of those striped delicacies known as humbugs, and with these he stayed himself while proceeding to cross the very loneliest landscape he had ever seen in his life.

Nothing moved within the scope of the moon, but Private Berry. He moved stiffly, chinking a little, and leaving behind him an almost visible trail of peppermint. As he walked, he considered and rehearsed what sort of excuses might most reasonably be offered for his late chapter of accidents. " Waited an hour in the market place for Private Corkery, Sir," he said aloud in a high, hurt voice. " Not my fault I was alone, Sir. . . I dunno, Sir. Maybe 'e got lorst too. . . No, Sir, not when I see 'im. . . Yes, Sir, workshop job. I tried an hour. . . I should say twenty mile, or maybe twenty-two, or a bit to that. . . Yes, Sir, *all* the way. . Yes, Sir, thank you, Sir." But the silence spun out his voice so startlingly that he stopped and looked about him. " It's a cemetery without no monuments," said Private Berry.

"Talk about a silence that might be felt! You can jolly well 'ear this one."

It was the quietness that troubled him. Into what country had he wandered, and where were the lines? He had been moving towards a low ridge that ran about a mile from the road where he had left the motor. He topped this rise at last, grunting a little, and very wary. And there beneath him, in the hollow, was the little town.

If Berry had been an imaginative man, he might have thought that the deathly silence possessing the world had its source and origin in this hollow. But he had seen many such villages before—unburied corpses lying where the tides of war had left them; won and lost, lost and won so often that now they had nothing more to win or lose forever, and so were briefly, at peace. He found a downward path contentedly enough. If there was anything left in the place, a roof, an egg, a heap of straw—he relied on himself to find it. But as he descended farther, he began to doubt if he should find even as little as the straw. He had never seen a town so scraped and scoured by destruction. He wondered if he would not have done better to stay by the car.

His boots rang on the first of the paving. A cracked trough with a puddle in it, reflected the moon frostily, and a whirl of dead leaves rustled past him and settled on a doorstep that had no house behind it. "Bare as the back of my 'and," muttered Berry. "I wonder which side 'eld it last. Them, I'll bet." And for no reason, a name sprang into his mind—"Von Eichensau." It was said that no one swept a place so bare as Von Eichensau; other things were said of him too. A fear took hold on Berry that he might be straying into the enemy's lines; he tried to tiptoe along the cobbles. He tiptoed massively for several minutes down the long wall of a building that might have been a school, but was so torn and shattered by shell that only a paved court and a small cupola over the gate remained to suggest its past. This court was raised from the street; half a dozen steps led to it. And here Berry stopped with a jerk. For an old woman was sitting there.

He couldn't have told you why she startled him; "Seeing her so sudden," he would probably have said. But the

shock lay in seeing her so orderly, so secure, so very *usual* ; she must have affronted him almost like an indecency in the midst of that ravaged corpse of a town—she, stout, fresh and unfrightened, in a blue cloak and a clean apron, and holding on her knee a big basket covered with a square of shiny waterproof cloth.

For a moment the old woman gazed at Berry ; not with fear ; but with a certain promise of blank resistance. The moon, however, was kind to Private Berry's honest "chunky" countenance : accentuated the appeal of a pair of eyes as innocent as a hungry calf's ; glinted on a battered badge. He could feel the precise instant when, without smile or sign, the old woman became friendly. He took heart and a long breath, and achieved his linguistic triumph—"Gee swee perdo."

A torrent of rapid nods and words answered him. The old soul clattered to her feet, patted his arm, beckoned him to follow her. She whisked off so quickly that he was left behind, staring in the moonlight ; overtaking her in three strides, and relieving her, with a not disinterested gallantry, of the basket, he nearly tossed it over his own head ; for he had expected it to be heavy, and he found it light. Peeping under a corner of the cover, he saw that it was full of little paper toys—rosettes, streamers, windmills, red, blue and yellow. He wondered greatly. But his French was not equal to the whole of the situation ; he followed in silence through the moon-whitened sepulchre that had been a town.

A single window warmed the black shadows behind the half burnt church with a glow so dim it would have been invisible in the moonlight. Here they stopped and crept through a door veiled in ruin and drunkenly ajar. The room they first entered was so wrecked that they crawled over piles of dust and rubbish, under sooty beams that let the blank white night through. Berry, very much on the alert, saw nothing unharmed, nothing that had kept its shape and use, but a single shelf upon which set a row of tiny wooden dolls. Then they went under a curtain of dirty canvas, into warmth and firelight and a singular peace.

The room beyond the curtain was undamaged, except that the plaster had fallen from the brick in many places ; and

it was neat and clean. A cheap lamp with a bright tin reflector was on the wall, there was a table covered with a blue checked cloth, a dresser with some old blue earthenware, a chair or two, an old painted bench, fire in a brazier. Two men were sitting on the bench as Berry entered, and they flashed to their feet with a swiftness of movement that was uncanny; for both were old. The woman began to explain in a shower of nods, patting Berry's arm. He caught "Anglais, Anglais," and patted his own chest, saying vigorously "That's me. . ." At the sound of his voice, they relaxed; one, who was a priest, dropped back upon the bench; the other came forward, bowing and rubbing his hands; he shook Berry's hand timidly. He was a small man who carried his head bent, and continually looked up under gray apologetic eyebrows. Berry liked him somehow; he returned the handshake heartily, and even attained to a "Bongser, Mosoo le cury," for the priest. The old woman passed into a room beyond, smiling and nodding back at Berry. And after a pause the priest answered in a voice rough and rich with the country's accent, "I speak some English, my friend."

"And very well too, Sir," returned Berry, politely at his ease and unburdening himself of the heavier portions of the tool kit. "I can get along well enough in the Francy, but it takes time. . . and maybe you could tell me where I am, Sir, for it's a matter of three hours since I knew!"

"This was St. Aubyn." The priest spoke with long pauses and hesitations, as if not sure of what he would say. The little man, who had been standing aside with his meek look of inquiry bent on Berry, now said something friendly, helped him off with his coat, patted him into a chair near the brazier, and called gently, "Judic, Judic!" The old woman came back with something thin but hot in a bowl and a plate of bread. Berry shook his head at her, he had some rations left, he didn't want to deprive them. . . But the curé said in his heavy voice, "You need not hesitate. There is plenty." So he ate and drank, watched by three pairs of eyes that were singularly incurious; it was not so much that they were uninterested in him as that they were absorbed in something else. And Berry, trained by war to be never

entirely trustful, wondered what it was. He resolved to know.

St. Aubyn. . . "You may well say, This *was* St. Aubyn." He addressed the company in general, and beamed on Mère Judic as she took away the empty bowl. "I've seen some places. . . None so bad as this, though. None so downright thorough. Which makes it all the queerer, if you'll excuse me, to find this"—he circled a thumb slowly about the dim, quiet room—"to find anything so 'omelike as this at two-o'clock in the morning." To himself he added, "You've a fine old face, Mossoo le cury, but it's a listenin' face. I wonder what you three are waitin' here for?"

"You know where you are?" asked the priest, calmly. "You have perhaps heard of this—this town before?"

"I 'ave." Berry was blunt. "Most of us 'ave. But I'd never 'ave thought to find a livin' soul inside of it, though."

"Ah!" The word was a slow sigh. "And yet there are three—living souls. Three."

"What makes you stay?" asked Berry suddenly, and he had not meant to say it. "If it'd been me—if this'd been my town—"

"Yes?" The old man on the bench smiled faintly.

Berry leaned forward. "Well, look 'ere," he went on rapidly, almost in a whisper, "wasn't this where Von Eichensau turned the guns on a school—because 'e said a shot had come from a winder?"

Again, faintly, the priest smiled. "Yes, my friend," he answered, with the air of politely answering irrelevant questions, "Yes, it was here. And that was the school, where our old Judic saw you first. You can see the marks on the walls. There was—how do you say it?—no place of refuge for the children—the little small children. . . Two of our good Rogiet's were there."

"Oui, oui." The small meek Rogiet seemed to catch the sense, and nodded and smiled nervously, like a shy child to whom attention has suddenly been drawn. "Oui, oui. Deux de mes petites filles."

"Well, then—" Berry stammered, and fell suddenly silent. The two Frenchmen had exchanged a brief glance, as two intimates exchange glances in a crowd of strangers; and it

was like the revelation of a hidden country by flashlight, a momentary rending of a veil in the temple of human pain. He felt himself a stranger, an alien to the passions, the thoughts, the memories that gave to the stuffy cheerful room the atmosphere of a spiritual battlefield. Here in truth was a language he did not know. He turned with relief to old Judic, who had appeared, with a candle-end, at his elbow.

"You will rest an hour or two—yes?" asked the priest. But it was not a question, it was a dismissal. Without a word Berry followed her up a little laddery staircase into a sort of loft. When she wished him good-night, he answered absently in English. He wished to be alone, to think whether it had been fancy or reality that before Judic had taken him to the stairs, she had turned to the door of the other room; and that a voice had whispered with a fierce emphasis, "Non, non, pas là. . ."

Well, as soon as the door of the loft closed behind her, Berry had his wish; he found himself quite shudderingly alone, resting his arms on the sill of the one small window, and covering his hands over his ears. He swore at himself in pure astonishment, for the action had been involuntary. "You're looney," he told himself, "going looney like the lot downstairs. Sittin' up all dressed at two in the mornin' and listenin'!. . . Wot do they think they're listenin' for? You've no call to listen, any'ow." He pocketed his hands resolutely and turned away from the window; but deep down in his soul something was crouching and crying that it didn't want to know, it didn't want to hear. . . Private Barry flung himself down on the straw mattress that lay under the window, rolled himself up in a couple of things that looked like tablecloths, pulled his coat over him, and determined to go to sleep.

Once he woke himself, saying, "But wot do they want to *stay 'ere* for?" Again, he found himself awake and standing at the window, which he thrust open. It was very stiff and the hinges creaked; outside, the world lay still, shorn, desolate in the moonlight; a dead world lighting the dead. The priest was standing under the window, looking up at it; when he saw Berry, he lifted his arm in silence and made the

sign of benediction. Berry closed the window. He had a file in his pocket ; this he wedged under the door, so that it could not be opened from the outside. There was something else in another pocket, a small neat weapon, of a kind not supplied by government to the private soldier. This he placed ready to his hand, and lay down again. He intended to stay awake, but sleep took him irresistibly.

The third time he woke as if forcibly wrenched out of that sleep. The voice inside him seemed to be shouting " This is it ! Now you'll know, now you'll hear ! " And he heard—what ? A voice in the room below, or the ghost of one, singing an old French version of " One, two, buckle my shoe." But the voice was not French. And presently the song broke off and ended in a hurry of shouted orders that sent Berry to his feet and to the door in a single cat-like bound. For voice and words were German.

" Trapped, by Gord !" panted Berry. He crouched at the crack of the door, the revolver fidgeting in his hand. He was remotely sorry for himself ; it seemed so stupidly unfair to have come through two years of war unhurt, only to be ' done in ' at last by three traitorous old peasants in a deserted town. But he'd do the French a good turn and take half-a-dozen along with him. . . He waited. He was not a man ; he was himself a weapon tense with death. And through the long-drawn minutes, nothing happened. All was still.

At last he could bear it no longer. His boots he had taken off. Silently he worked out the wedge and opened the door. He stole down the stairs and into the room below. It was dark now, but there was a white patch of moonlight on the far wall, like a square of paper stuck there. Across it was creeping the black figure of a man. In an instant, Berry had him pinned.

There was a certain satisfaction in gripping and holding and feeling the frightened heart pound under his arm. . . He wondered if the revolver would go off if he used the butt ; and why the man made so little effort against him. . . He turned the face up in the square of light, and it was the meek Rogiet, apparently half-dead with fright. Berry gave an ugly little laugh under his breath. He was suddenly and

savagely angry. "Where are the others, you Judas?" he whispered, forgetting the little man could not understand. He slid the revolver forward until it rested almost against Rogiet's grizzled cheek.

Over his own shoulder an arm passed, and the revolver was strongly grasped and held. He wrenched it free and sprang back by one instinctive movement, covering both Rogiet and the priest, who stood quite still before him. Only Rogiet made a little scared movement to get in front of the curé. "Well?" gasped Berry hoarsely. "Well?" The priest raised his hand.

"My son," he said gently, "you are mistaken. Go again and sleep."

Berry began to laugh, silently, rocking a little on his feet. "I 'eard, I tell you, you dam liar," he whispered, "I 'eard 'im,—singin' and shoutin' orders to his men. Tell 'em to come and take me! Tell 'em. . ." He wheeled to the door of the other room, for suddenly within it the voice rose again, shouting commands. With a sob, Berry backed away, but only as far as the wall, waiting for death when the door should open.

It opened. And there came out Mère Judic.

It was too late to stop the shot; not too late to jerk up the barrel in the very act. The bullet ripped into the ceiling, and old Judic's face stared at him horrified in a cloud of dust. The place was full of dust, and furious talking and confusion; out of which the priest came, and stood in front of Berry, and laid a kind hand on his shoulder.

"You are mistaken. But you have not the blame. That is ours. We should have told you. . . But we thought he would be quiet."

Berry simply waited.

"That is our prisoner you hear in there."

"Your prisoner. . . ?"

"Yes. Do you understand? It is how you say it?—our prisoner. When they left the town—the last time—one, he remained."

"Why?"

"He would not go," said the priest gravely.

After some time, Berry passed his hand over his eyes.

"O yes!" he agreed wearily, "I understand—just about as much as I understand what'd keep an 'Un 'ere on his own, and what'd keep you three, who are none of you as young as you was, 'ere to look after 'im; and what brought me into it at all. . . And you take it in turns to guard 'im, you and Mister Rogiet and the little old lady?"

He rubbed his eyes again with his knuckles.

"We do not guard him."

"Not guard 'im . . . ?"

It seemed to Berry there was a certain chill, a certain stillness abroad. That the priest's voice came from a distance when he said "There is no need. All the treasures of the whole earth, they would not call him from that poor room. . ." And he led Berry to the door, and opened it.

It was a very small room, with a slanted roof and a truckle-bed, and it was full of shadow. From the shadow sprang one clear and unforgettable face, with loosened mouth and eyes fastened on the doorway at about the level of Berry's belt. And Berry knew that face; knew the arched nose, the singular long jaw, the hair black and close as sealskin; knew them, as did thousands of other men, from whispered stories in billets, from half-uttered tales under the stars, when voices broke into curses forgiven of God. . .

"My son, I said to you—is it not?—that there were but three living souls in St. Aubyn. And it is true. This is a dead one. Soon it's body will die also, and then we shall go."

When had the door been shut and that face hidden? Berry did not know. He was sitting at the table with his elbows on the blue checked cloth and his hands over his eyes.

"Why does 'e stay? . . ."

A silence. Then—"He will not pass the children in the doorway. He sees them there always, all about him—the little young children—so very small and young . . . When they went, and we came back, to see if there were any of the others, we found him in hiding in the crypt, you understand. He could not get away from those little children—our little children. . ."

"'E's mad, of course."

"Of course. Perhaps we are all a little mad."

"And you stayed—Gord, you stayed!—with that mad devil!"

The priest cried in a terrible voice. "Do you think it was not good for us to stay? We of St. Aubyn—we three who are here and live—do you not think that we have need to believe in God? Do you not think we have need to keep under our eyes the beginning—the so very little beginning—of the judgment of God? Without the faith in that justice, we could not live, we could not save our souls. We were lost. . . lost. . . But '*panem de coelo praestitisti eis, alleluia. Et tecum principium in die virtutis tuae, in splendoribus sanctorum.*' . . ."

"And—and the ole lady—the little toys in the basket?"

The priest's voice changed. Berry knew that he was weeping. "Eh, what shall I say? I am an old man. I have no children of my flesh. . . *He* is mad, and *Judic* is very mad too, and very old. . . She says they are there, the children. She says that she sees their faces between the light and the dark. Small happy faces under a whiteness like the veils of the First Communion. Eh, we are very old and we have seen too much. . . So she makes the little toys still, singing as she twists the paper. And she takes her basket to the steps of the school, and sits there as she did use to—and—sells them. What do I say? I know not what she does, or what is given her. . . Only that she returns, and sometimes her basket is. . . empty. . ."

"And the madman in there?"

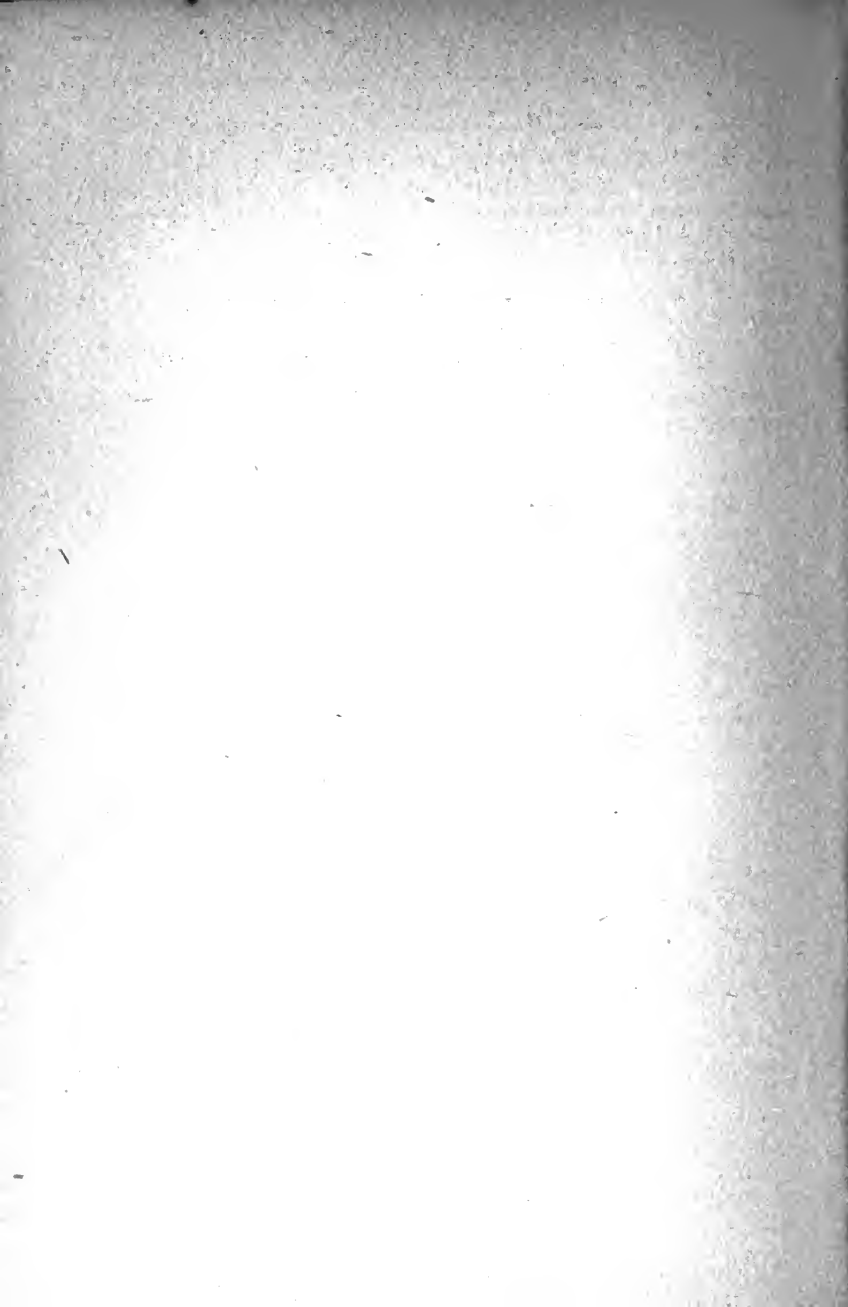
"Is Kurt Von Eichensau. Yes." Presently he added, "If you do not object, I will open the door. If the door is shut, it causes him to make an outcry. We do not want a noise. You need not fear, he will not come out. He will not cross that threshold where stand the little children he killed."

When dawn, colourless and cold as the moonlight it replaced, drew a faint line along the rim of the ruined land, Berry slowly climbed the path that led him back to his world. Once he stopped and raised a hand to the curé, standing—though Berry could not see him—in the soot-black shadow of the church; where the one window still glowed dimly, like a watching eye whose light was soon to be quenched.

Again he stopped, and looked at something that lay in his hand; it was a little paper windmill which Judic had given him out of her basket for a keepsake. But he stopped a third time by a little bush which grew on the slope, where a few green spires promised crocuses. He stuck the windmill-stick in the earth; the gaudy little toy began to twirl merrily in the wind.

"I won't take it away," said Berry jerkily to himself, "the kids—might miss it."

The ridge rose behind him and hid St. Aubyn. Striding very quickly, he went on to meet the dawn.



TWO WAYS



TWO WAYS

"THERE'S another!" Charron rested his pick amongst the shale, and glanced across at the flanks of Mount Morin, where a new snow-field had broken loose from its moorings, and plunged into the tremendous valley in a spout of diamond dust, with a roar that jarred the rocks. There had been early snow in the hills, followed by warm weather; and the lordly heights of the Nicolum were stripping themselves of their frozen cloaks. Charron looked uneasily at the ranges, then glanced at his chum. "Jack," he went on, with some hesitation, "I guess the time's come to decide if both of us, or only one, can go out this year."

Men don't speak of leaving the Nicolum before the winter, or of going down from it, or away from it. They say "going out," and it's an expressive phrase.

Jack Rainger straightened slowly; a tall fellow, grave, and a little stiff in the back; stiff, you would have said, in the will, too. He smiled across at Charron's fair-haired, sanguine youth, saying: "Then we'll have to decide which one's to go, for there isn't enough dust to take us both out on a holiday, and bring us both back again in the spring!"

"Sure only one can go, Jack?"

Rainger drew from his belt a little sealskin bag, and tossed it to the other. "Weigh that!" he said. "That's all we've saved. And there's just about enough dollars in it to pay one fellow's expenses out and back. The other'll have to stay behind and work. The question is, which of us two *needs* to go out the most?"

Charron lowered his eyes, as if a little afraid of what his chum might read in them. Tapping with his pick among the loose stones, he muttered: "And whichever goes, it'll be deadly hard on the one that stays behind."

"Yes," agreed Rainger, quietly. "Deadly hard."

Charron glanced up, swiftly. "If—if it wasn't for Maisie," he said, awkwardly, "you should have every ounce of it, Jack, old man, and welcome. But—I have to think of her too. I—I want to see her" His voice broke; he turned away, staring at the hills which stand round about the Nicolum as they stood at the world's birth. "Sometimes," he went on, hurriedly, "I've felt as if I couldn't stand it another minute, that I'd have to throw over everything—throw *you* over!—and go out for good, without making my pile or anything, tear these cursed rocks down, kick 'em to powder, just to get a sight of her! I—I made a face in the snow last night, like I used to make of clay in the barn-loft a thousand years ago. *Her* face. I kissed it when I'd made it. It was like kissing the dead"

The broken young voice trailed to silence. Rainger stepped across the flume, and lightly touched the shaken shoulder. "I know, Will," he said, softly. "I know. It's that way I feel about Laure."

Charron, without turning, reached for his hand. "I know," he said, again. "You're—you're the best of good chums, Jack. The *best*. I don't forget about you and Laure. I don't forget that it's two years since you've seen her, too. But—you know Maisie!" He turned a flushed, stormy face. "You knew her. You were such friends. You must be able to guess what she'd be to a fellow who was more than a friend. That night I was at her house, saying good-bye, and you had to come to fetch me, for fear I'd miss the train"

He was silent again, and again Rainger touched his shoulder softly, saying: "You should have the dust without a thought, Will, if—if it wasn't for Laure."

"That's it. It's because of them. We'll have to decide as justly as we can, keep the chances level, for their sakes. But I don't know how."

He turned, with an attempt at a laugh. Rainger did not echo it. He, in his turn, was staring at the granite barrier, beautiful and terrible, builded between them and their desires. He said: "It'd be only fair, only right, that the one to go out should be the one who needs to go most. But I don't know which that is." He moved with a sharp sigh, stooped, and

picked from the ground two chips of quartz, shiny as stars. He balanced them in either hand. "Laure—Maisie. Maisie—Laure!" he said, grimly. "Which is it to be? For I take it we're thinking more of them than of ourselves. Which needs the most to see her promised man?" He dropped the chips abruptly, and turned away. "Come, Will," he finished, "we may as well quit work for to-day. It's near sunset, and it'll be a rough road home, without the darkness added to it."

He took up his prospecting tools and walked a few yards along the ledge. Charron did not at first follow him, Rainger waited, and at last the other joined him. The younger man, still in a flushed dream, was gazing at something that lay in the palm of his hand. This, with a boyish impulse, he held out to Rainger.

"Look, Jack," he said, softly. Rainger looked. It was a silver hairpin—a little prong of metal headed with a silver ball, carved like a fourfold flower.

"Maisie's," went on Charron, almost in a whisper. "D'you remember that last night when you'd been out to Weston to say good-bye to Laure, and you came on with the outfit in a cab to pick me up at the house in Cedar Street, where I'd been saying good-bye to my Maisie? I remember. You came in, and you found us all in the sitting-room, and Maisie's mother was teasing her because I'd knocked her hair down. Such pretty hair! It came down because she'd given me this out of it. She had two in, and she gave me one,—warm from her hair, Jack. Later on the rest of it came down; she'd lost the other pin. I begged her to let it stay down, d'you remember? She made a face at me, and she said: 'I can't stick it up now the other hairpin's lost. P'raps I've given *that* to someone else, you old silly!' And— and then the evening was gone, and there was nothing left of it all but this silver hairpin." He slipped it back into his inner pocket. "Well, I'm a selfish fool, Jack, but I can't stop thinking of her. Come on, and we'll have flap-jacks with rum in 'em, and perhaps the gods'll decide for us."

They turned in silence down the windy ledges towards the little log-built shanty, that for two years they had called

home. And as they went, each saw a face drawn upon the lovely dusk. To those faces their hearts turned with the devouring longing born of uttermost solitude; no man knowing them, could have said which heart yearned the more strongly to its goal. Charron walked with a frowning face, his big fingers clenched upon the little silver pin. Rainger had his face raised; his eyes sought the first star, and rested there.

No human eyes saw them, none awaited them, none expected them; but on the high ridges ahead a watcher rose suddenly to his delicate hooves, shook his great curved horns to the wind, and fled away like a shadow. They had been seen of the mountain sheep; and as the leader wheeled, he loosened a broad stone, which slid, and rested, and slid a little farther. There it gathered to itself a shower of pebbles, bright as roving stars, quartz pebbles, and damp snow; and shifted again, and hung quivering.

Rainger was ten yards ahead when the roar came from the heights immediately above them. And Charron cried out and leapt forward; but if he had gone on wings he would have been too late. The mountain spouted death at them. He saw the snow-slide pouring fluid as foam, eddying like cloud, yet whirling the lesser boulders with it, and tearing the young spruce trees from their hold. Then the fringe of wind and stones and whirling snow-clots caught him and struck him aside, as if he had been a straw; he was bruised, blinded, beaten to his knees, to his face. He rolled instinctively to the inner side of the ledge, and lay huddled there, without feeling, without thought, almost without sense. Only when silence, save for a dying thunder of reverberant echoes, brought strength again to bruised mind and body, he struggled to his feet, his clothes in rags, as if he had been fighting a pack of dogs, and staggered forward, crying to Rainger.

He had no thought that he would find his friend. For the mountain-side was swept as if a vast broom had passed down it. He crawled to the lip of the ledge where it overhung the sheer abyss. He was sobbing as he looked over; for the hardships and sacrifice of those two iron years had bound him to Rainger, and Rainger to him, in a more than

brotherly love. And there, not twenty feet beneath him, he saw Rainger's body resting against a shattered balsam, dragged as if a tide had swept it, and motionless.

"Jack! Jack! can you hear? I'm coming to you, chum!"

He thought the figure stirred faintly. He was not sure. He looked round desperately for help.

But,—shaken, battered as he was,—all help must come from him. He summoned his reeling will to govern that rebellious brute, the reeling body. He had a thin rope coiled round his waist, which they had used in some of their perilous short-cuts from the claim to the cabin below; he unwound it, the mountains spinning about him in wheels of blue and white and violet as he did so. He was almost afraid to draw breath lest he should start another slide, and the helpless man beneath him be dashed away; but in that event, they would both go He found a stump which would bear the rope. He was panting all the time: "Jack! Hold on, Jack. I'm coming to you." There was no response. He wondered, as he lowered himself, scrambling down the steep beneath the ledge, if he would find his friend dead. He couldn't realize life, somehow, with old Jack out of it

He brought up with his feet on the balsam roots; they were slippery, for the snow had peeled them of bark as you peel an orange. He turned with caution and stooped to his friend. He was trembling, the strong young man, like a girl. He scarcely dared touch that motionless head, raise the pale face streaked with scarlet, bind the rope about the body. It was long, and new, and unfrayed, and he thanked God for it. When he had adjusted it, and rested Jack once more against the roots, there was plenty of slack. He climbed again to the ledge and rested there a moment. Then, by sheer muscle, hauled the other up, drew him over, laid him on the planed and polished rocks, and went down beside him.

He could do no more for awhile. His strength was as water. He could not even stretch out a hand to find if Rainger still lived.

By and by he drew himself to his knees. He turned to

Jack, and lifted his head to an easier position. How pale he was, dear old fellow He slipped a shaking hand under the torn shirt to feel if the heart beat at all ; and sky and hills grew to an awful stillness in their places, as his fingers closed on and drew out a little canvas bag.

It had hung about Rainger's neck. That same awful stillness of the heights was on Charron as he felt within it a little metal prong headed by a carved ball.

A silver hairpin

" I can't stick it up now the other hairpin's lost. P'raps I've given *that* to someone else, you old silly ! "

The remembered words beat upon him in hammer-blows, for all their music of laughter and speech. He looked about him half-stupidly, thinking to see beside him the elfish, teasing face in the cloud of loosened hair. He saw *only* the ice-veins in the rock, a single fan of golden lichen the avalanche had spared, and then that other face—Jack's face—frowning now, flushed a little with returning life, trembling back to consciousness.

And all those long months Jack had worn against his heart that other silver hairpin from Maisie's fair head. Traitor, that he was, to Charron—to Laure. Or was there another traitor ! Had he taken it, or had Maisie given it to him ?

Charron shrank and twisted as he had writhed away from the snow-slide. But no space could separate him from that doubt. It leapt full-armed to life. It came irresistibly as a tide, drowning every foothold of faith in a moment, washing away every barrier, laying waste the soul. He turned heavily in that aching stillness. He wanted to tear the bag from its cord, grind it into a little scrap of rubbish, and throw it into the deep—that was his first thought. He had let it fall again on Rainger's breast ; he laid a twitching, ice-cold hand on it ; and Rainger lifted his own hand and laid it over Charron's.

" Will ! " he said, faintly. Then, in a stronger voice : " Did the slide catch me ? I don't remember. My head's very bad. Did I go over with it ? "

" Yes. "

" And you hauled me out again ? "

"Yes."

Rainger smiled. "Good old boy!" he whispered. "You'd never go back on a chum, would you, Will? I'll be all right in a little while. I guess I was stunned. Might have been dead but for you, eh?"

"I—wish you had been"

"Will!"

"I—wish I'd left you to lie there,—you vile thief!"

An appalled wonder settled on Rainger's face. He raised himself to his elbow, still staring at Charron; got to his knees, then to his feet. They faced each other, those two ragged, battered men, at a yard's distance. For long minutes neither moved, neither spoke. Then Charron stretched out a shaking hand to the little bag Rainger had covered with his own.

"Tell me where you got it!" he said, thickly.

"What? What? Are you *mad*, Will?"

"The hairpin. Maisie's silver hairpin. The other one,—in the bag round your neck!"

"You *are* mad! There's no hairpin there!"

"Show me! *Show* me!"

Rainger's face hardened. He answered, harshly enough: "No! You can take my word for it!"

"You—vile—liar!" said Charron, heavily, and came nearer.

"Will, old fellow, you're sick, you're not yourself"

"I'm not myself. I shall never be myself again. You and Maisie have killed me."

"Will, for God's sake, listen!"

"To more lies? I felt it there under the canvas; felt the prongs and the ball on the top carved with little silver roses. Maisie's other pin. She said: 'P'raps I've given that to someone else, you old silly'. Had she, Jack, *had* she? Or did you pick it up? I could forgive you then, for you couldn't help loving her, could you, though I'd be sorry for Laure? Tell me if you found it or if she gave it to you. Tell me Only tell me the truth, no more lies! All these two years and nothing but lies. Jack!"

Through white lips, Rainger said: "I shall neither speak to

you, nor lie to you, as you say, again." And there was something implacable in his quietness ; he was quick to pity where he loved ; but doubt was to him the unpardonable sin against any love. And Will—Will!—had refused to believe him.

" You *shall* tell me if you found it or if she gave it to you ! "

Rainger was silent. He had his own dumb devil of pride, which would have kept him silent then, though the world fell.

" Jack ! If I *kneel* to you . . . ? "

Silent still, and almost with wonder, Rainger stared at the man who doubted. And there rose up against Charron all the bitter longing and desolation of those exiled years. Something seemed poised above him, rushing down on him ; an avalanche of darkness such as no hill ever loosed on man. He staggered forward, crying terribly : " You shall tell, if I have to tear the truth out of you with my hands ! " He flung himself, panting, on Rainger, bore him backwards. They fell together and rolled to the lip of the ledge. Charron was uppermost. A swift and dreadful energy was his, a sureness of strength. He thrust Rainger outward till his unsupported head was over the sheer fall, the swept rock, and the spruce far below. " Tell now ! " he said.

Rainger's head went back, his eyelids fluttered, he was near fainting again. The edge of rock burnt the back of his neck like hot metal. His anger fell away. He felt that he must keep very quiet, or Will would have something to be sorry for The thought came mechanically ; he could not have spoken to save either Will or himself.

" Did you find it ? Did she give it to you ? "

Rainger's senses wavered. He heard the words from a distance. Yet those were Will's hands brutally grasping him, that was Will's savage, panting breath. The edge of pain passed to his shoulders and scorched there. His neck was an agony. He was beyond speech then, even if his hurt faith would have let him speak. The sky rode upon his eyes, beneath him the earth swam in vast abysses of silver and amethyst. The universe swung and poised, ready to crush him ; then steadied to a calm star. He knew

he could not lose the star. Nearly gone, his eyes rested on it. He just breathed the word: "Laure"

He was aware of a cry going past him. He felt himself drawn suddenly to safety and laid down. He felt no more. Once again the world went out in a sweep of many waters; but even there he knew his star was with him, and would be with him to the end.

He woke, from swoon or sleep, to a world grown darker. The air was cold, and solemn with an utter quietness. The hills were silvering in moonlight before the day had entirely faded from them. Many stars were there, a great company of witnesses. He sat up; and saw at his feet the black shape of a man crouched upon the rock.

"Will"

Charron lifted his head slowly from his knees. His face was changed as if years had passed over him. He said slowly: "Do you remember? You're speaking to a man who would have killed you an hour back."

"I remember. Is it so long?"

"Yes." The dead voice altered; he went on, hurriedly. "I have sat here with you. I have not touched you. I am not—fit to touch you. I've waited; not knowing if you'd live or die You can never forgive me, of course. It's past that. But if you could give me the charity you'd show to any cur, the kindness you have for a lost husky or a hungry Siwash and then let me go"

The broken, humble voice died away. After a long silence, Rainger said: "Then you did not look?"

"No."

"Come and look now, then. I was wrong too, Will. I should have spoken."

Charron crept to his side. Rainger lifted the little canvas bag and shook something from it into his hand. This he held out to Charron.

"This is what was in it, Will." Charron's very life was in abeyance as he looked and looked again.

"Two long needles," went on Rainger's quiet voice, "their points stuck in a shrivelled chestnut that Laure picked up in the woods one day. They're the only needles I've got whose points will go through leather. I keep 'em that way round

my neck so they won't get rusty. That's your silver hair-pin, Will."

After a long time Charron moved. He sank slowly to his face, and lay there with his hands clasped over his head. Presently, he began to cry as a tired child cries, with sobs and broken words. Rainger waited, silently. When that passion had also spent itself, he too, moved. He took from his belt the pouch containing the hoarded gold-dust, and laid it by Charron's hand. "This is yours, Will," he said, gently.

Charron looked up. His eyes rested on the compassion of his friend's face, as Rainger's eyes had rested on his star.

"I guess this has decided for us, Will. You're the one who will take the dust and go out and see your girl this winter; for you're the one who needs to go the most."

Charron looked at him, still with breathless, humble questioning.

"It's this way, Will. Laure and I, we're secure of each other. We can wait. Two years—five years—twenty; if it's God's will we can afford to wait a lifetime, and know it will make no difference. She trusts me as I trust her. Love like that—casts out fear." He finished, almost with tenderness. "If I'd seen you with anything of hers—the most intimate, the most dear things,—in your hands, on your heart, I'd have known there was some explanation. Even then I *couldn't* have doubted her . . . or you."

"But it's not that way with you. Your love isn't self-sustaining. It needs to see, to touch, to *know*; or else it doubts and suffers. Take the dust and go and see Maisie. But—don't teach her to doubt, poor child."

"Jack . . ."

"Ours is the stronger, you see, Will. And the strong things of life can always afford to wait. It's you who must go and I who must stay, because your need's the greater of the two."

He rose unsteadily to his feet, and waited a moment. But there was no word from Charron, flung before him in the dust of the soul. Rainger turned away and took a few steps down the giddy ledge, holding to the rocks as he went. But

in a little while he paused, and turned again, and called, wistfully : " Will ! "

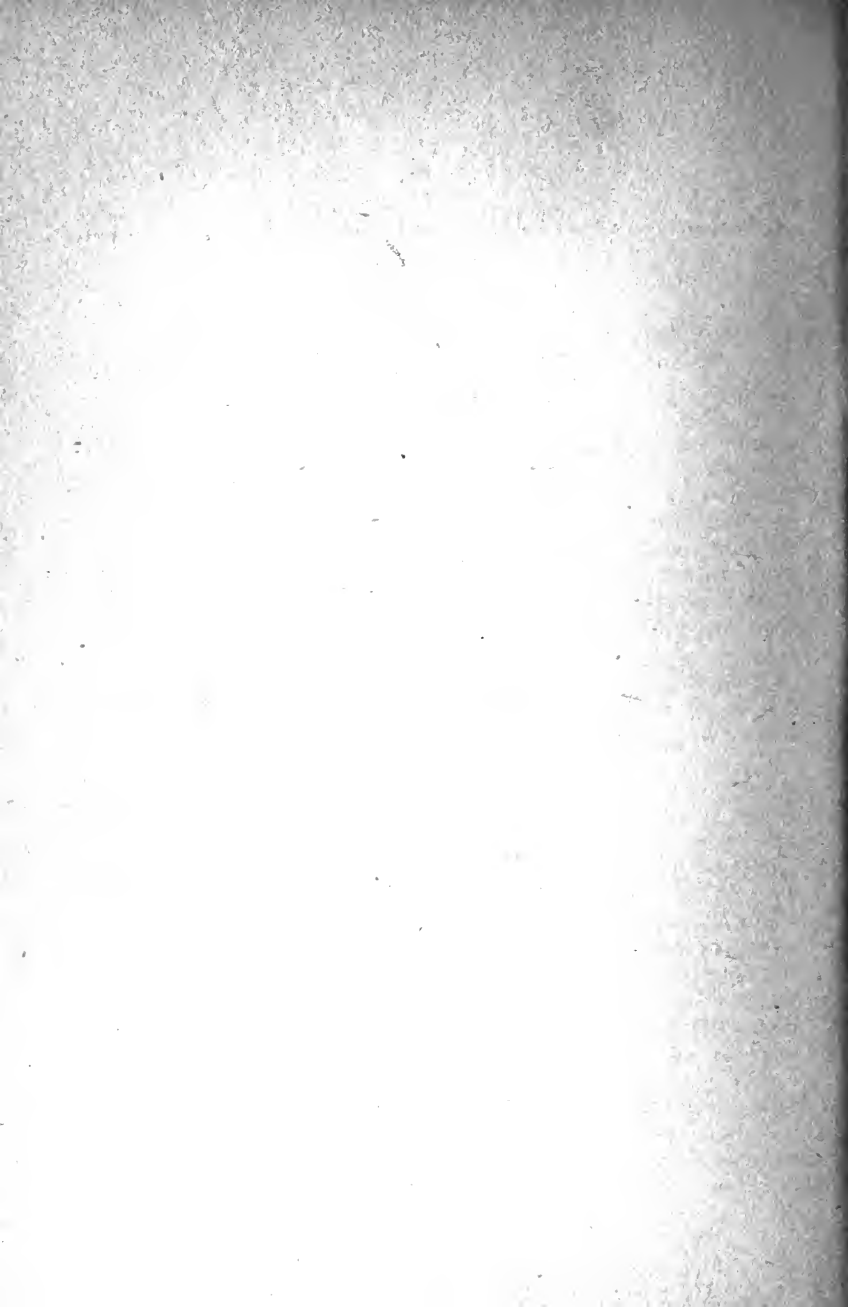
Some sort of a broken answer. Rainger, his eyes on his serene star, smiled a little.

" I'm kind of—knocked about, Will. Won't you come and help me home ? "

He stood patiently in the clear, kind twilight, till, with a great sobbing cry, Charron rose and ran to him, and put a strong arm around him, holding him as though he would never let him go. And so, under the eternal patience of the stars, they went slowly down together to their home.



THE DESERT ROAD



THE DESERT ROAD

CUTHBERTSON, urging his jaded horse over the last of the weary miles from the mines to Los Santos, always pulled up at old Juana's hut. He had pulled up one day when new to the work and the land, deathly sunsick ; and Juana had dragged him into the shadow of the wall, and given him water, and finally tramped into the town for the superintendent's buggy and mules. Cuthbertson never found out why she had done this, but he was grateful, in the silent way he had early learned of the desert. Since then she always had cool water for him, and a skin spread in the shade. And sometimes she would talk to him in brief Spanish. He was the only white man to whom she ever spoke ; and she spoke to him because she thought him like the Rainmaker.

If you asked anyone in Los Santos how long Juana had been there, they said, "God knows." Cuthbertson thought it quite likely that God did know, and kept account of it.

There were peach-orchards round Los Santos, and the sound of running water, and a pleasant acreage of alfalfa fields. But green life stopped where the water stopped ; and westward of the last irrigation ditch lay the desert, oldest of all things save the sea. When the east wind blew by day across Los Santos, the scent and bloom of the orchards was breathed out into the sands. But at sunset, when the west wind brought the bitterness of the alkali-wastes, the little town seemed to cower and shrink beleaguered in the heart of the vast night. Only the steady sound of running water, like the footfall of a sentry, stood between Los Santos and the eternal threat of the sand.

The road ran through the town and out into the desert. It paused at the mines, then went on and was lost in the coloured hills of the far distance. No rain fell on these hills, which were like great jewels worn brittle and thin with ceaseless wind and sun. If a man had business with

the desert, he went by that road ; sometimes he returned by it. Between the town and the mines, beside a tiny pool that dried to white dust in the heats, was Juana's hut.

When there was water in the pool, she grew a few melons and a patch of corn. When it dried, she carried water from the anks, miles away. She had a pot hanging under the roof of her hut to keep cool, and in the drip of it, gray lizards and snakes and earth-coloured birds would gather silently. They were voiceless creatures of the voiceless waste, but not more dumb than old Juana.

Every evening she climbed to the crest of a long wave of sand and watched the sun going down at the end of the desert road. She saw the night sweeping inwards visibly with a movement that was as a sound, the sound of great wings trailed along the sand. Then the stars glowed out in the transparent heights of darkness, the lights of Los Santos, twinkling within their defences, were answered over the curve of the world by the one high light from the mines. Then she went home and slept, knowing that that day no word would come from the Rainmaker.

Once, looking at Cuthbertson with her grave eyes, she said, in the speech he but half understood, " Hate is more patient than day or night, the sand is more patient than hate, and love waits longer than the sand."

Cuthbertson leaned his head back in the shadow. Westward a mirage danced in the heat, and the crumbling dry hills seemed to lift from blue water and green reeds. He said, " I don't like the sand, Juana."

Old Juana laid her hand on her breast. " It takes youth and strength, wit and the memory of many gods. I'm only an old woman of the sands." Her eyes glinted at him like a snake's. " Only an old woman. . . But the desire of the heart is stronger than the sand."

Cuthbertson sighed, thinking of the machinery abandoned at Lost Mesa when the water dried. " We've found nothing stronger than the sand," he said grimly, " but tell me about it, anyway." He had a queer liking for the old woman, and he was grateful ; besides, if she would talk, he might profit to the extent of a paper for the Smithsonian.

Juana looked out over the desert. After a time she said,

"It is a long time since I was a girl, and the young men fluted to me in the cool of the evening, and in the maize-dance my shadow was blest. Like a shadow at midday was the Rainmaker to me. He was my husband."

Cuthbertson shifted in the shadow so that he faced her, and his long boots creaked.

"There was no town then, and no mines. Only the cuttings of the Lost People in the mesas, and this little pool. We came here, my man and I, together. He said, 'Stay here and rest, it is a good place. I am going to look for turquoise in the hills, and when I find another good place, I will send word. Then follow.' He touched my long black hair and smiled upon me, and went. I watched him as he walked down the road into the wings of the sunset. Then I went back to my water-jars and waited."

She was silent so long that Cuthbertson said, lazily, "Well, Juana, what's the rest of it?"

"There is no more. I am waiting still for that word that tells me to follow. But it does not come. Somewhere between here and there"—she pointed to the vacant glare,— "the sand took him."

"The sand. . . ?"

"Yes. Perhaps. The wind blew and the moving sand took him while he slept. Or perhaps the water had gone. I do not know. But if he lived, I should have seen his face, heard his voice. And I see him only in dreams, hear him only when the wind blows on the Lost Tombs of the mesas. There are many such."

"And—you're still waiting for word from him?"

"There is nothing else to do." Juana would say no more.

Cuthbertson rode into Los Santos silently that night, thinking of many things, and the Smithsonian was not one of them. He went to bed early at the superintendent's house, where he stayed; the superintendent's daughter had found him an inattentive listener to her songs; he slept to the faint whispering of blown sand on the iron roof. Sand and yellowed peach-leaves rustled on the floor of his room. And he dreamed all night of a nameless Indian who had gone to look for turquoise in the hills, years and years ago. He dreamed too of Juana. "Is there anyone,"

he found himself crying with a kind of passion to the night, "who'd wait like that for me. . . ?" And he rode on his way before breakfast without saying good-bye to the superintendent's daughter. Somehow, old Juana had set him a new standard of the soul.

After that, as he rode into the hills in the endless search for water and wealth, he thought very much of Juana and the Rainmaker. Old Juana being an established fact, his thoughts went chiefly to the nameless dead man who still lived for one old woman. Riding up the stony Arroyos, through the wine-red gateways of the hills, the sun blistering his bridle-hand and the hot southwest drying his lungs, he began to reconstruct the Rainmaker's journey from the pool beside Los Santos. It amused him to map it out mentally and in time this mental map grew to be a very minute and logical thing. Then, after the manner of men who lead lonely lives in places where the wind gives death and the sun madness, he began to see his own imaginings.

The first time this happened, he rode to Mesa City for a case of assorted medicines. He dosed himself variously ; but the doses did not affect whatever obscure brain-cells or nerve centres were thrown out of balance. They went on busily at their work of building for Cuthbertson the bodily likeness of the Rainmaker.

As the thing went on, and his mind remained otherwise unshaken, Cuthbertson began to regard it scientifically, as befitted one who kept Smithsonian Reports in his packing-case of a room at the mines. He had methodical notes in a diary :—

"April 7. Found reputed spring near Presidio Pass. Water strongly impregnated mineral salts. (Cf. Analyst's report on sample). Horse would not drink of it. Saw Rainmaker again. Hallucination commenced 11.45, continued until 12.4. He walked parallel with me at a distance of about 25 feet. Headband of antelope skin, circlets of copper or gold, large turquoise on right wrist. Appearance very vivid, as it has been from the beginning. Thought at first it was real Indian, like the one I rode down last week thinking he was an apparition, and had to pacify with 2 dols. (Mexican). Noticed at last that the hair, which is very long

did not move in the wind. Face seemed turned away as usual, or somehow indistinct. Letter from Macnamara re sale of machinery at Lost Mesa. Bay pony injured.

"April 18. Sale of machinery fallen through; advised scrapping for old iron. Mac too thrifty make money here. Rode out to the Presidio pools again. Saw Rainmaker suddenly, walking along sand on parallel course as usual. Exceptional that he really does walk instead of sliding along like a magic-lantern picture. Have an idea that the face is not turned so far aside as it was. Don't like this. Apparition somewhat indistinct otherwise against violent stratification. Had to shoot bay pony. Ordered new safety razor.

"April 25. During hallucinations, which are becoming more frequent, pulse and respiration remain normal. It must be overwork. Rainmaker joined us to-day three miles east of the pools. Very vivid, but only lasted ten minutes. Face undoubtedly being turned towards me. Apparitions coincide remarkably with supposed route of journey. (Logical effect of conscious on sub-conscious ideas or vice versa). Sand moving badly in prevalent winds, lower end of Presidio drifting up. Should I tell Juana?"

But he kept silence, as a lonely child keeps silence over the visualization of his imaginary play-fellows. He was keenly interested, and only at times a little afraid. The apparition always came after a day of unusual fatigue, and in exactly the same way. He began to watch for it as for a friend. . . . Turning some rock wall or corner of desert, he would find himself riding parallel with an Indian, who walked through the sand about twenty-five feet away as a tired man walks. Then Cuthbertson would say to his pony "There's the Rainmaker," and watch. The pony never paid any attention, and the moving figure never came any nearer. Through it there always ran a certain flicker of uncertainty, as through a mirage. And, like a mirage, it shook and thinned and went out.

Perhaps it was the lonely child, coming to the surface in the lonely man that made Cuthbertson, as the vision passed, lift his hand to the brim of his Stetson with a soft "Vaya con Dios,—go with God."

The machinery at Lost Mesa found a purchaser at last, and Cuthbertson, through three blinding hot weeks, had to see it taken apart and numbered and packed on mule-back to the Los Santos line. Mules died and men sickened, heads grew light and tempers uncertain. For these three weeks, Cuthbertson lived at the mines; he had no thought to spare by day or night for the Rainmaker.

On the last day he rode back from Lost Mesa to the mines, alone and tired out, sitting his tired pony like a sack. The hills reeled in the afternoon heat, the desert was a grayish glare under a sky so hot it had no colour in it. Cuthbertson was waiting thirstily for the hour when the mesas would suddenly stand up in the evening like the foundations of some apocalyptic city forgotten of God, and the dark sweep in on the world like a wave foamed with stars. He looked about him as he rode, as though half-consciously waiting for something. He was waiting for the Rainmaker. Presently, as he turned down a shallow arroyo grown with mummied yuccas, he saw the little white dazzle of the eyes that preceded the vision.

"There's the Rainmaker," he said as usual, the man clear in his brain. "But I didn't think he'd been so far west." The Rainmaker was walking through the sand as a tired man walks. With a little jump of the pulses, Cuthbertson saw that the face of the apparition was turned fully towards him.

He sickened for one strange instant, fearing, with a fear as old as the desert, the shadow of his own dream. But the face, seen uncertainly through the flicker of the heat, was only that of a young Indian of the sands; lean, grave, watchful. The headband gleamed with copper or gold, the hair fell long and straight. And beneath it the eyes were directed, not at Cuthbertson, but intently beyond him to the east, along the desert road.

"I know," said Cuthbertson, quick as thought, "you're looking for Juana. . ."

He reined in. But the figure moved on, still looking to the east. Against an outcrop of honey-yellow rock it broke and went out. Cuthbertson shook up his horse and followed slowly.

The rock was surrounded with great waves of loose sand that drifted perpetually before the prevailing winds. Sometimes it was buried, then in a few days, bared to the sky. Now as Cuthbertson stooped from the saddle, he saw that the wind had uncovered a little worn hollow in the rock, and in it a pale glitter of colour. He dismounted. The glitter of colour was a piece of turquoise veined with gold.

He had it in his hand. Then, slowly, he stooped and took out what else there was from the keeping of the desert. These things he tied in his handkerchief and fastened to the saddle, and his brown fingers shook a little over the knot. Mounting he rode on. But at the foot of the arroyo he looked back gravely, his hand at the hat-brim.

"Rest with God," said Cuthbertson.

It was late before he stopped at old Juana's hut. She sat just within, her chin on her knees, staring out at the low steady stars.

"Juana." Cuthbertson's voice was very tired.

"Come in, señor." Her eyes gleamed in the dusk, alert and watchful as a snake's. Her face slowly puckered into wrinkles of kindness. But Cuthbertson would not enter.

"It's the sand, Juana," he said, and now his voice was not quite steady. "It has given up something,—something it had hidden for a long, long time under a yellow rock beyond the last pools. It has spoken, Juana. Perhaps the word is for you, perhaps for someone else. I don't know. You told me once the sand gripped hard as the grave."

Old Juana raised her head. "But the hold of the heart is stronger," she said, in the language Cuthbertson scarcely understood. But her eyes commanded him. Silently he stooped across the hut's threshold, laying the beautiful veined turquoise at her feet. And with it what had once been a man's hand.

The sand had dealt with it so long that it was no more terrible than a child's toy of bone and leather. The night-wind moved it as it lay, lightly as the yellowed leaves of the peach-orchards, on Juana's mat. A small square agate, bound in gold wire, shifted on the forefinger. Cuthbertson showed it silently.

"It is the Rainmaker's ring," said Juana at last. "The word has come."

Cuthbertson bent his head. "There was nothing more. Just the turquoise in a little hollow and the curved hand,—kind of keeping it. . ."

"He was keeping it for me," said old Juana quietly.

"There was nothing else. The rest had been taken by the sand, long ago." His horse shifted restlessly outside, and he moved to leave. He was deadly tired in body and soul, lonely of heart.

The old woman sat motionless, but her eyes glowed. "It is the word," she said again contentedly. "I have waited a long time. Now I can go."

"Go with God," answered Cuthbertson in deep Spanish as he mounted and rode on to Los Santos.

And when he was out of hearing, Juana wept. She placed her water-jug where the lizards might reach it, and scattered her ground corn on the sand. What the desert had restored to her she hid in her bosom with little murmured words. Behind her the lights of Los Santos twinkled within the guarding water, and ahead the lonely light from the mines shone across the curve of the world. But as she went down the desert road her face was to the stars. Before her the clear dusk parted as in welcome, it closed behind her like a tender barrier to be passed no more. Above her was the infinite heaven and the hosts of it. Under her feet the sand that took all things, youth and strength and the works of all men's hands, but might not wholly take love.

Old Juana was going at last to join the Rainmaker in a good place.

LA TRISTESSE



LA TRISTESSE

THIS is not really the story of a child, though it began when Hypolite caught the measles at dancing-class. And when he was getting better, his uncle, who kept a business-like eye upon his health and his manners, sent him to Madame Dulac at Saint Jacques de Kilkenny, to grow strong in the air of the hills.

Hypolite was a little boy at the time, quiet and brown, with eyes like bronze-purple pansies. It was not his fault that his surname was Gibbs. Even at that age, he preferred to have it ignored. Madame called him "M'sieur Hypolite," or "le petit sieur." But then, Madame had served and loved his mother when that mother was Geneviève de Lempriere, before she married Anthony Gibbs, and before Hypolite was born, or Madame herself took boarders. To Hypolite, two white shafts in a cemetery outside Montreal represented that ill-sorted father and mother. But before he had been a week in the village, his French began to return to him.

"It is yours by right," said Madame, who would hear nothing of the Gibbses. "What wouldst thou for thy dinner, mon ange?"

Madame fed him royally and made a baby of him, and told him stories of the long-ago days, and spoke to him of his mother. In a little while, the Gibbs part seemed to have dropped out of his life. He loved Madame, and Telephore who chopped the wood and André who worked in the garden. But most of all he loved Félice.

Félice was Madame's help in the kitchen, a girl who belonged to nobody, for whom nobody cared. Perhaps the incipient artist in Hypolite first rejoiced in her; she made an impression on him never effaced. His canvas in

last year's Salon, that canvas full of brown and gold, was a far-off memory of her.

"She was Dian," I have heard Hypolite say "Dian; not the stately goddess, queen of Nature, but the ever-young Artemis, slender as her own white crescent."

Hypolite ran about the straggling village and made friends with the children; and climbed the little hill beyond the Calvary, and looked at the great river running to the sea, wishing he might follow it.

"There are many nice things here," he said, invading the kitchen for cakes, "and nice people. André is nice and Telephone is nice, and so is m'sieur le curé. But Maxime is nicest. I went to-day to see him. He lives in a little cabin all covered with vines, and he has two fields covered with mustard and flowers. He is tall and he has blue eyes. I picked some of his flowers and he came out and talked to me, and told me his name and I told him mine. Then his dog came out, his black big dog he calls Sorrow,—*La Tristesse*. Why does he call it *La Tristesse*? It is a nice dog and licked my hands."

Madame looked up from her cake and crossed herself, with wide eyes. "Hast thou made friends with Sorrow, mon petit?" she asked, gazing at him strangely. "I am grieved. Maxime and *La Tristesse* are not for thee."

"It is a very nice dog," said Hypolite, in the gruff tone that was his sole heritage from the Gibbises. Félice was beating eggs at the table. Her long gray eyes turned lazily towards the child, and then were bent upon her bowl again. Her wrists fascinated Hypolite as she whipped the froth, they were so small and strong and firm, sunburned to a creamy brown. He watched them while he ate the cake, and wondered what her cold eyes had tried to tell him.

"Why am I not to make friends with Maxime's *La Tristesse*?" he demanded of old Telephone.

Telephone stared at him as Madame had done, and made the little sign against evil. "*La Tristesse*?" he said. "*La Tristesse*? If you make friends with Sorrow, Sorrow will abide with you."

"But she has not abided with me," put in Hypolite patiently, "she abides with Maxime."

Telephone crossed his scarred, knotted hands upon the haft of the axe and leaned his chin upon them. "Not always," he said in a low voice, "ah! not always. Henri l'Eccossais, he was a strong man last Michaelmas. He stopped to speak with Maxime at his door, and patted on the head that La Tristesse, brute of ill name and ill omen. And she, that La Tristesse, she follows him home, beating with her tail and begging him to look at her, as some dogs will. And he laughs, and gives her bones, and she sleeps a night in his stable. In the morning she goes home, drifting like a black ghost down the road. And Henri, little monsieur, what of Henri? In three days, look you, he is seized with a chill and a weariness, and in a week he is dead,—mon Dieu!—dead! And that is not all. If I had my will, Maxime and La Tristesse should be—eh! sent from here."

Telephone's face was as superstitious and cruel as the faces of some of Millett's peasants, and he muttered to himself as the bright blade of his axe fell upon the wood, and the sweet white chips flew in showers like a tiny snowstorm.

"But that is all foolishness," said the round-eyed Hypolite, in the lordly tone Saint Jacques de Kilkenny had taught him. "La Tristesse is a nice dog, though she is long and black and cries with her eyes. Once I had a little guinea-pig, un cochon d'Inde, black as Sorrow; but it died of an indigestion."

"Foolishness, is it?" muttered Telephone. "Then, little monsieur, there are many fools in Saint Jacques. As for the cochon d'Inde, that was different. Gabrielle has a little sucking-pig, and no one is troubled by it, though it visited every house in Saint Jacques. But this Sorrow of Maxime's—foolishness, is it? Eh, well! Pray the good saints you may not be taught its wisdom."

Telephone was cross and would not talk any more. André professed to have no opinion at all about La Tristesse. So, as was his way, Hypolite decided to go to headquarters for information.

He crossed one of Maxime's thriftless fields, and went up the path to the cabin. Once the path led through a garden of flowers, but now garden and fields were all one, overrun with blossoms grown small and hardy and wild, which could not be found elsewhere in Saint Jacques. La Tristesse was

lying by the door, in the sun, licking a long red scratch on her side. She put her lank paws on Hypolite's shoulders and thrust her melancholy nose against his cheek.

"Are you come for more flowers?" asked Maxime, rising from among the wild raspberry canes. "There are pretty flowers in the field beyond the patch of barley. I shall grow oats there next year, they are prettier than the barley, but the flowers are best. My grandfather brought the seeds of some of them from the other side of the world, and a few braved our snows and frosts. Pick all you want, little monsieur." He laughed at Hypolite, showing his white teeth, and yawned and stretched himself. He was tall and strong, with a fine tanned face and eyes of Breton blue softened by many dreams, and he was shabby to the point of rags.

"Thank you," said Hypolite politely. "But I did not come for flowers to-day. I came to ask why you call your dog Sorrow? Pardon, m'sieur, if I am too curious."

Maxime bowed, ready laughter in his eyes. "I am honoured with monsieur's interest," said he. "I call her Sorrow because she has the look of it, as any one of these—ganders of Saint Jacques would understand. I found her roaming in the woods, starved, all over of a tremble. I took her home and fed her. That is all there is about her. She would harm no one. Yet, because of her colour and her melancholy she is a witch and a loup-garou and I know not what besides." He laughed angrily and touched Sorrow's side gently. "Look you here!" he cried, "this was done last night. It is the mark of a bullet,—of a silver bullet, perhaps, they are such fools." Hypolite touched the scratch too, with fingers light and tender, and Maxime's face softened again.

"We have no friends, *La Tristesse* and I," he said sadly. "I suppose it is because we do not work or go to church. But those stuffy saints—And why should I work? I have no one to work for, but myself."

"I'm not very fond of work," confessed Hypolite. "My uncle says I must go into an engineer's office when I leave college, but I do not want to. I would rather paint pictures full of pretty colours."

"And I," said Maxime, "I also love pretty colours. When I want them, I look at the fields and the skies and the hills, and I am content." They smiled at each other in perfect understanding.

"And I am a friend to you and La Tristesse if you will have me," said Hypolite.

"Monsieur honours us," said Maxime simply, "but Loneliness and Sorrow are an ill pair of friends."

Hypolite dined with Maxime and La Tristesse, under the vines, with leaves for plates; dined off bread and baked potatoes and little trout from the brook and wild raspberries. "It is poor fare," said Maxime shyly, "but the air and the sun make it sweet."

"It is lovely," answered Hypolite ecstatically. "I should like to have baked potatoes in a little oven and catch little fish for my dinner always. Oh, always."

"The bread is soft and white," went on Maxime, "feast-day bread, such as you are used to eating."

"It is the same as Madame Dulac's," said Hypolite with his mouth full.

"It is the same as Madame's," repeated Maxime, laughing.

Madame scolded Hypolite for the first time, when she heard where he had been. "It is an ill place," she cried, "and those who dwell in it have an evil name. That black thing, called a dog, ran and barked at one of Gabrielle's cows yesterday, and already the cow has sickened. Go not near that La Tristesse, I beg of you, child, nor near her master."

"La Tristesse is a very nice dog," repeated Hypolite in the voice of the Gibbises, presenting so stony a front to her shrill vexation that Madame broke into tears and flounced away. When she had gone, Félice slipped over to the child, and, without any change in her small, cold, beautiful face, kissed him. He gasped; feeling as if he had been kissed by a flower, so cool and soft were her lips.

Gabrielle's cow died, and the whispers against La Tristesse changed to silence, which was a bad sign. Hypolite did not know that there were very few people in Saint Jacques who would have gone to Maxime's door after dark.

And then the rumours began again, but this time they came from the woods. - In the village there was silence and listening. But from the woods there issued a new dread,—a dread of night and loneliness and the sickness that strikes therein. Telephore first put it into words.

"It is said," he told André in a whisper, "that far to the north there is a deserted village. When that village was full of people, there came to their doors a black dog, long and gaunt and wretched. They took pity on that dog-thing and fed it for three days, and then it went away. But it had left a gift for those people. La Picotte struck them, coming silently as is her wont. They died like flies those people that fed the black dog, and the few that were left ran away."

André stared, his face growing gray with vague horror. He was slower than Telephore.

"If I were you," said Telephore with a sort of frightened sneer, "I would change the name of Maxime's La Tristesse. Maybe she is only biding her time."

Two or three days afterward, Hypolite went to see Maxime. It was early evening and he moved through a golden world. "I have never forgotten anything of that evening," he said long afterward. The sky was golden, the air was golden, and everywhere about the fields was the golden glow of mustard. But in front of Maxime's cabin there was a black little crowd of people, and in the road stood Maxime, facing them fiercely, his hand upon Sorrow's head. There were boys there, throwing stones, and one or two of the shouting men had old shotguns.

I ran to them, and I think I was screaming with anger. But Telephore was in the crowd, and he caught me in his arms gently, and made me keep still; though I kicked, and bit his hands, and my teeth were as sharp as a squirrel's. When they saw me, the men who had the guns, lowered them as if ashamed, and the boys stopped throwing stones.

Josef, Gabrielle's husband, was speaking. "We will not harm you," he said, "but if you would stay among us, you must shoot that black brute you call your dog, there under your hand."

"I will not shoot her for any of you cowards of Saint

Jacques," cried Maxime at that. The crowd growled threateningly.

"Then go!" cried Josef, "you and your dog-thing!"

"I shall never forget how Maxime looked, his head thrown back and his eyes like points of blue fire, facing the men who were casting him out of his home. I thought he was going to fight them all. He looked down at Sorrow, cowering beside him and trusting him, and I think he yielded for her sake. He laughed very bitterly.

"I will go," he said, and they shrank from his eyes. "Sorrow has been my companion and my friend, she has shared my food and my fire, and with Sorrow will I go. She is more faithful to me than any other."

And then a girl pushed suddenly through the crowd, and stood in front of Maxime. It was Madame's Félice, and she was laughing aloud. I had never heard her laugh before. "If you go, I will go with you," she said.

Maxime's face was suddenly strange and wild at the sight of her. "You—you—you?" he cried. "You—you, O heart of my life, star of my dreams?"

I think he forgot all about the angry crowd on an instant.

"Yes, I," laughed Félice. "I have seen your heart in your eyes, Maxime, and now you may see my heart in mine. What is the need of words? If you go, I go with you."

"There is a kind priest at Termination," said Maxime, hot and fierce, his blue eyes on her gray ones that were no longer cold.

Félice laughed still. It seemed as if she could not stop laughing for very happiness, but her beautiful creamy cheeks showed no blush, "As you like," she answered; "we will go to the curé if it pleases you. But if you go, I go also. I am faithful as *La Tristesse*."

"Come then," said Maxime. And that was all. They forgot the people who were watching them, awed and silent before this strange divine thing shown forth in their midst. Maxime never even looked back at his little cabin, and Félice never looked from his face. They moved away down the road together, hand in hand into the great golden sunset, and Sorrow following them, leaping and frisking. That was absolutely all, and it was over in five minutes.

But think of the wonder of it,—a flower of Greece in her golden days, a vision of Italy, a dream of ancient France, there suddenly showing forth for all men to see.

They went unmolested down the lonely road. Once Félice shook her slim arms above her head as if in a very ecstasy of joy. Once Sorrow jumped up to lick her hand.

Yes, they went, and were hidden in the golden mist of sunset, and were gone. Nor did I ever hear of them or see them again,—Maxime, with his blue eyes, his gentle hands, his long lazy body, his rags and tatters ; Sorrow, black and faithful as her namesake ; Félice, beautiful as the ever-youthful Artemis. Nor can it be said that I saw them go. For I was down on my face, crying so that my tears made little gray runnels in the dust of the road,—crying for the loss of the most beautiful thing I had ever known.

WHITE MAGIC



WHITE MAGIC

LOBELIA is the new residential suburb on the outskirts of a new town, which is itself on the outskirts of most things. The Big Woods come right down to the streets of Lobelia; bears have been seen on Frontenac Boulevard. Yes, Lobelia is pretty new. But not so new that you'd expect to smell kinnikinnick there.

Yet, one June evening, a savour of that tobacco plant passed along Frontenac Boulevard and down Centre Street and up Magnetwan Avenue. Here and there, an old-timer, relegated to carpet slippers and a back bedroom, sniffed it, and dreamed of prairie and poplar-bluff and the Blackfoot brave outside the H.B.C. Store. Leigh Harvey, busy lifting dandelions from his beautiful lawn, with a dental-looking instrument, dropped it and knelt motionless in the growing dew. He set his big hands on his hip, because they trembled suddenly. To himself, he whispered, "*It couldn't be him—come at last—after all these years.*"

He drew a deep breath. The smell was yet in the air. He raised his keen eyes slowly from the dandelions and looked across the hedge that screened his new iron fence.

At the base of the gaudy fence a man was sitting, smoking a little, blackened corncob pipe. He was a mere kernel of a little brown, old man, within the husks of many formless garments. On the grass edge beside him was a pedlar's basket.

Leigh Harvey, leading citizen of Lobelia, rose silently to his feet. He was shaking. His strong mouth twitched. His eyes were guarded, watchful, but triumphant.

He leaned across his new iron gate with the gold knobs on it, and said, "Hallo, there!"

His voice was rough with emotion held in check—for four years. The old pedlar looked up sideways, cautiously. He twitched the shiny cloth cover off the big basket.

"Boot-laces," he began, mechanically, "pipes, ver' cheap pipes, plugs, machine-oil, stickin'-plaster, spools, ver' nice handkerchiefs."

He shook a faded rag out of the basket. Harvey leaned over the gate, his new gold watch-chain tinkling against the iron—a stalwart figure in shirt-sleeves. "You come far?" he said, as carelessly as he could.

"Ver' long way, boss."

The old man pointed north with his pipe-stem. He dangled the faded handkerchief.

"You travel about much this way?"

"All over, boss." The old man's hands began to refold the red handkerchief.

"Stop!" said Harvey, suddenly. "I want to buy that."

"Ver' nice handkerchief."

A silver coin changed hands. The old man shook the ashes from his pipe into his palm, and scattered them to the winds. He began to strap his basket.

"You haven't," said Harvey, slowly—"you haven't got any more—houses and gardens in there?"

The quick glance of the black eyes was wary.

"This," went on Harvey, indicating the house behind him, the finest in Lobelia—"this here came out of a basket like that."

The old face creased slowly into a hundred doubtful wrinkles. With a gesture that said, "That may be a good joke, but it's beyond me," the pedlar went on covering his basket. Harvey was beset by a fear that the old man would yet slip out of his hold.

"Stop a bit!" he said, desperately. "I want to ask you, did you ever know a feller called Gammett?"

"I forget, boss. I know fellers all over."

The old man was sending Harvey the swift, impenetrable glances of a wild thing frightened. He was strapping his basket quickly. Harvey, gripping the gate in excitement, spoke commandingly.

"Wait! I've got something to tell you. Wait!"

The old pedlar hesitated, then silently acquiesced. He squatted once more at the foot of the fence, relighted his pipe, and prepared to listen. Once more, with the faint blue

spiral of kinnikinnick smoke, the lost years came down on Harvey like a wave.

"There was a man," began Harvey, abruptly, "a man who was down and out, five years ago."

The pedlar glanced up at him.

"Most fellers bin that," he suggested.

"Most fellers been that," agreed Harvey, slowly. "But not many have the bad luck this one did. And one can't rightly say it was his fault. He'd fought it. My faith, how he'd fought his luck for years! But it just seemed that everything he touched went wrong. Year by year he went down, and down, and a little bit farther down. He tried farmin', but he hadn't enough capital to tide over the bad seasons. He tried prospectin', and his health gave out. At last," he said, quietly, "this feller got so far down that he was workin' for a Chinaman—for a Chink that kep' a little store way up in the hills.

"When that job failed," Harvey went on, after a silence, "Gammett got him."

He glanced at the old pedlar's back, every fold of the rags covering it instinct with listening.

"If you *don't* know Gammett," he went on again, "I'll have to tell you. Gammett had a store, too—a big store. He made a fortune by helping people. Yes, he was very helpful, was Gammett. If a man was in bad luck, or ill, or'd been on the bust and spent all his money, Gammett was right there, ready for help. He'd supply goods, would Gammett—at his own prices. Many a feller that Gammett helped in the bad years has spent all he made in the good years payin' off Gammett. Yes, every down-and-outer in the hills got on Gammett's books sooner or later.

"This feller, this down-and-outer I was telling about, he was on Gammett's books, and Gammett ground him hard. Gammett got him. And I hope"—Harvey's big fist gripped and quivered on the gilded iron—"I hope Death and Judgment's got Gammett!"

After a moment the heat went out of him. He glanced keenly at the pedlar's back.

"If you'd been at Gammett's store," he said, "one autumn day five years ago; if you'd been sitting on a log in front of

the store waitin' to see Gammett on the quiet to sell him some poached mink pelts, then you'd have seen this feller I'm telling about. He was sitting on the log, too. Sitting there with his head in his fists, staring at two little parcels on the ground between his boots. There was a pound of tea in one. There was some rolled-oats in the other. He'd just given Gammett his silver watch for 'em, the last thing he had left, the very last. He hadn't even hope or courage left. He was down and out."

The pedlar on the other side of the fence took his pipe out of his mouth with a soft "cloop." He turned his old head and stared at Harvey steadily, with impenetrable eyes. Harvey met the long look as steadily. By-and-by the old man turned away and resumed his listening.

In a low voice, Harvey said :

"There *was* another man sitting on that log. He was an old man even then. He looked kind of poor, but not so's he was worryin' any about it. He had a brown face, like yours ; a long coat, like yours ; and a big basket, like your basket.

"After a bit, them two on the log got talking. And the down-and-outer, he told that old man just what I've been telling you.

"He told him more. Why, I dunno. It just happens sometimes that when a feller's beat out, he'll talk. This feller talked. He said, 'It ain't for myself I mind so much ; it's for *her*.'

"'You married ?' ses the old man. And the down-and-outer, he says, 'Yes ; eight years ago. We haven't been apart since. But the life's too rough for her.'"

Harvey glanced back at the house. He went on, after a moment :

"The down-and-outer, he said : 'You see, she's not just like other folks. Not just the same. We had two kids, and we lost them. It was too rough for them, too. I wasn't able to do all I should,' he said, 'and they died. Since then she's not just right. She thinks that if we had a garden they'd come back, the kiddies would. A white garden she wants, a garden full of white flowers, and a white cat. Then, she thinks, they'd come back to play. And the grief of it is,' says the feller, 'that she'd need so little to make

her happy, and that I can't get it for her.' Then he cursed Gammett, and got up and struck off down the trail, home."

Harvey's strong voice failed, sank to a whisper. He stood, leaning on the gate, motionless. The old man on the grass outside was as motionless as he. At last, he said, softly, "D'you see anything queer about my garden, friend?"

The pedlar's answer came slowly.

"All the flowers in it are w'ite flowers."

"That's right. All the flowers are white. But wait.

"This feller, he went off down the trail, home. It was late, and it looked like a bad night. He'd gone maybe a half-mile, when someone overhauled him; he saw it was the old pedlar he'd been talkin' to. The old man, he stops the down-and-outer and puts a little packet in his hand.

"'What's this?' said the feller. And the pedlar said, 'To make a garden for the children,' he said, just like that, and turned away and was gone before the feller could say 'Thank you.'

"He's been waitin'," said Harvey, gently, "to say 'Thank you,' ever since."

Evening was closing to a perfect night. White flowers fell from the locust-trees along the grass, and moths as white and silent haunted the garden of white flowers. A woman came from the house and stood on the white steps as if she were watching something in the garden shadows, and a white cat rubbed against her dress. Harvey's voice, when it came, was hushed; yet it seemed to break a silence as perfect as a pearl:

"When the feller I've been tellin' you about looked at the little packet, he saw there was writing on it. It said—Harvey spoke as if reading from memory—it said, '*White Columbine. Hardy perennial. Sow in autumn in carefully prepared soil.*' D'you see anything queer about the flowers in my garden, friend?"

Again the answer came, slowly, from the other side of the fence:

"There are many of one kind."

The old man stretched a hand through the bars and lightly touched one blossom of a thousand white columbines.

"That's right. And when the feller had read the writing

he gave a kind thought to the pedlar, and put the packet of seeds in his pocket, and forgot it.

"He'd enough to make him forget more things than a packet of flower-seeds an old pedlar had given him. *If* you knew those hills, you'd know that there was storms on 'em that leap on a man like wolves. He was caught in one, and all night he was lost on the mountains.

"Level rain that drove in his face like a wall: wind that bruised the livin' flesh on his bones: sleet to glass the rocks, and a moon no more than a blot in the scud—he knew no more of the night. He kep' going some way, thinkin' of the woman that waited for him. If he hadn't fixed his mind on her he'd have just given up and laid down and died, for the weather used him cruel, and he'd no heart to fight it, only because of her. Then he found he'd missed the trail, and he didn't greatly care—only for her.

"He went on in the dark and the storm, tryin' to strike back to the trail lower down. He couldn't make it. Seemed as if he was in hills he'd never been in before, so strange and wild they were with the dark. At last the rain beat him down, and the wind dazed him, and he fell.

"He thought he fell into death. He did fall a long way, but not that far. He came to, very weak, sprawled on a slope of loose stones. If he moved, they moved too. He'd no wish to move for awhile. He was badly knocked about, and his clothes were half-tore off his back, but after a bit he thought of his wife, and got to his hands and knees, groaning. Then the moon came out clear, and he looked at what the slipping stones had uncovered."

Harvey's voice shook a little. Presently he steadied it, and went on briskly:

"Silver was not so cheap then as it is now. Even in the dim moonlight he knew what he was lookin' at. He was lookin' at a vein of almost pure silver them sliding stones had uncovered.

"He laid quite a long time, just lookin' at it. Then the situation come home to him.

"He didn't know where he was. He didn't know where the silver was. He couldn't get his bearings. He didn't dare mark the place too plain, for fear someone else'd find

it. After a while, he made shift to build some little heaps of stones. Then he went on as well as he could. You see, if he'd stayed by the place till daylight he'd have been dead in that weather. He had to risk it.

"He found his way back to his wife, somehow. He never remembered anything of what happened after he left that place.

"He was near dead, and they thought he was ravin'. Maybe he was. He was ill a long spell. They were helped. When he was sick folks was kind, and they took kindness where they'd been too proud to take it before. Even when he was ill he fought to keep a tight hold on his tongue. When he could crawl he went out to find his claim.

"He couldn't find it.

"Sweatin' and tremblin', the ghost of a man, day after day he wandered in the hills, lookin' for it. He quartered the ground like a hunting dog, but he couldn't find the place. There was a hundred spots like his memory of it; a thousand slopes of loose stones. The rain and the wind had swept his little rock-piles away. He had nothin' to go by. Wealth beyond all he'd thought of, all he struggled for, all he prayed for—for her—was there, somewhere in them hills under his feet, and he couldn't find it.

"Men thought he was mad. He let them think so. Maybe, as the time went on, he *was* pretty near mad.

"For the winter went, and the spring, and still he was trampin' the hills, seekin' the claim he couldn't find."

Harvey glanced down at himself, thoughtfully.

"He began, then, to *look* as if he was mad. A gaunt thing in rags. I dunno how he and the woman lived at all in them days. He didn't do any work. He was all the time lookin' for his claim."

Harvey glanced up at a star limned in a sky as clear as water. "I hope," he said, under his breath, "all he said and thought and did in them days is forgiven him. If his soul was black in him can you wonder? If he was ready to curse God and die, can you blame him? After all, 'twasn't for himself he wanted it so bad.

"There was a day at last, a day in summer. He kind of woke up from a nightmare that day. And he knew it was the end.

"He knew he was finished. He knew he couldn't go on no more. It's so, you know. A man gets his soul used up same as his body, when things is too much against him. He knew he just *couldn't* go on. He went out in the hills that day, just the same. But he was through with it. The dirty tricks of Life had downed him. He was flat on his back, laid out on the mat, in the great Ring that's seen the finish of better men than he.

"He kissed his wife. He didn't take a pick or a shovel that day to dig rocks with. He took his old gun. And he told her—God forgive him!—that he was goin' to shoot birds.

"He went away, miles about the hills. Everything looked new and strange to him—like things do when you're looking your last on 'em. He didn't regard where he was goin'. It was all one. At last he came to a valley under great rocks, where the spruce clung with roots like snakes. He'd no memory of it. He sat down and set the gun between his knees, and slipped off his boot."

Harvey's voice checked, faltered. For the first time he moved. He leaned across the fence, and laid a big hand—which shook a little—on the shoulder of the old man squatting in the dew.

"Only for that old pedlar-man that gave him the little packet of flower-seeds," he said, solemnly—"only for him, that feller's bones'd be layin' among the rocks to this day, where the foxes had left 'em.

"For he had his toe on the trigger, friend, when he saw white flowers in bloom a few yards off. At the foot of a slope of loose stones—white columbines.

"There's plenty of columbines wild in the hills, ain't there? But these were the dovey kind, the garden ones. His eyes, that were so near shutting on the world for ever, saw 'em for a minute without understanding. And then . . .

Harvey paused again. His hand quivered on the old man's shoulder. "And then his memory gave him back some words: '*White Columbine*,' he was reading off of the paper. '*Hardy perennial. Sow in autumn in carefully prepared soil.*' He remembered putting it in his pocket; and then no more of it from then till now. He guessed how it had spilt out of his pocket when he fell in the storm. And the

seed had filtered into the cracks, and the sun had warmed it, and the rain had fed it ; while he was ranging the hills like a lost soul it was safe, and growing, and waiting for that moment, as if the Lord had laid His hand over it till the right time came. And now the time had come. That feller had come into the valley to die ; and the little white flowers, like nests of doves, they bade him live. He scraped with his gun-butt in the stones—and there was the lode.”

Harvey was silent. Silent as he ; the old man took his pipe from his mouth, and shook out the ashes. A drift of tiny red sparks sank and settled and died in the dew. The reek of the kinnikinnick died. The half-tropic breath of locust and tobacco came into its own.

“ That,” said Harvey, “ was the beginning of the White Columbine Mine. And ever since ”—his hand gripped the lean shoulder, his voice rang loud—“ and ever since then that feller’s been looking for the old man that gave him the flower-seeds, and, in so doing, gave him life and fortune and happiness.

“ And he thinks he’s found him,” finished Harvey, huskily, leaning low over the fence—“ he thinks he’s found him at last.”

After a time the pedlar glanced up at him. He said, very gently : “ W’at that feller—that good feller—want with the ole man when he finds him ? ”

“ To give him anything he wants,” said Harvey, quietly.

“ What ? ”

“ If he wants a house, it’s his,” said Harvey. “ If he wants a farm, it’s his. Money, it’s his. Anything he wants.”

He was smiling, but his keen eyes were dim. The shoulder under his strong hand was so frail, the coat so ragged, the face turned to his so impenetrably old.

“ And if that ole pedlar-man want nothing, my frien’ ? ”

“ He must want a thousand things ! ”

“ Not one,” said the old man, softly.

“ But—”

“ Listen. It is my turn.”

“ I’m listening.”

“ That pedlar, he is ole. Will he grow young if you put him in a fine brick house ? ”

“ No.”

"He is ver' poor. But the poor man who wants nothing, he is as well off as the rich man?"

"Maybe."

"You would lay him in a fine, soft bed. But if he did not sleep there for want of the branches and the wind moving in them?"

Harvey was silent.

"You would give him rich food and drinks. Good! But men may starve to death with full bellies, my frien'; and if he starved so for the dawn in summer and the shantymen's fires in the winter, and the trails of all the hills?"

Again Harvey was silent. The old man rose slowly, and lifted his basket. Harvey started. He said, passionately, "But look at what he—at what you did for me!"

Very gently the old pedlar smiled in a creasing of dim wrinkles. "He only carry the basket," he said, softly. "It is the good God that settles what shall come out of it. For you, the fine house and the garden full of white flowers for madam to walk in. For me . . ."

He slung the strap over his shoulder, pulled out his paper of kinnikinnick, filled and lighted the little pipe. "Good man, you," he said, between puffs; "but there's one thing you cannot do. You cannot give to the one that wants nothing."

"I shan't give up. There's a thousand of the best waiting for you whenever you want it, anyway. When you're older or ill my turn'll come."

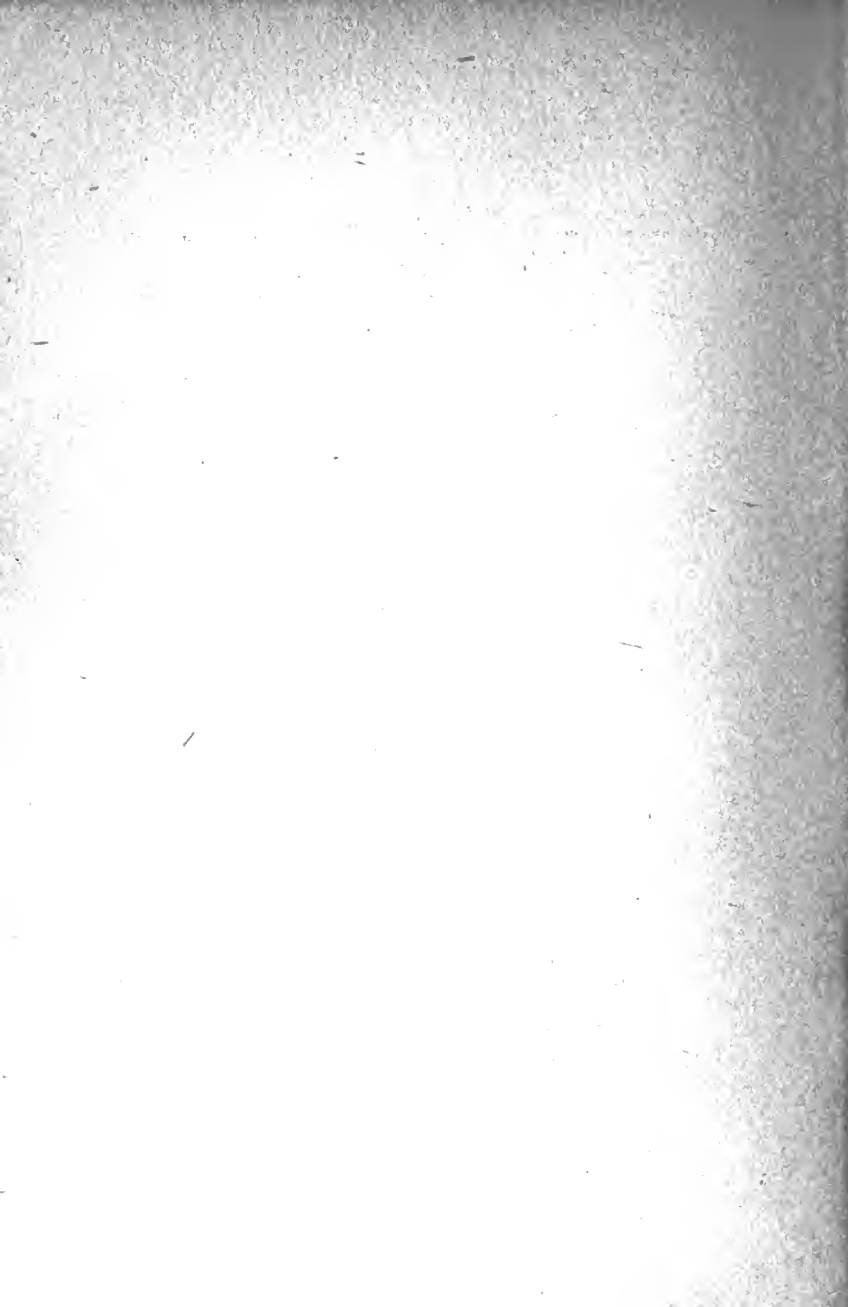
"Per'aps." The old figure was withdrawing from him into the shadows—infininitely alien, infinitely remote.

"Will you take *nothing* now?" called Harvey, as if to someone a very long way off.

The old man hesitated. Then, from the columbines nodding through the fence, he picked a single blossom. "This," he said, "to remember." His voice, too, was withdrawing, fading away.

The savour of kinnikinnick passed along Magnetwan Avenuc, and past the Public Library. Harvey was left, motionless, in the dusk among the white columbines. He held in his hands a red handkerchief. He lifted it, and breathed the rank smell that opened to him the gates of all his past. Shamefacedly, he brushed it with his lips.

THE BOG-WOOD BOX



THE BOG-WOOD BOX

"THIS is not a story," Great-Aunt Hawthorne used to say, "it is just something that happened."

Mr. Denis Duchesne first saw the box one evening in the shop window, behind a bowl of Japanese silver fish and a windflower blossoming in a blue china jug. It was a little box, quite plain, and by the look of it had lain long a-soaking in the black bog-water. He brought it for a shilling and threepence three farthings, and took it home to keep fiddle-strings in. And no sooner had he taken the lid off than out shone a little green light and a spark.

"'Tis glow worms in the box," cried Denis, clapping it down. The little light went out quick as a blown candle at the word, and something skittered over his fingers like a flittermouse.

And that was the last leprechaun ever came out of Ireland.

Denis himself had come out of France as a bit of a boy. He taught music and dancing, and was little enough thought of, for all he was grown a fine young man with a wild brown eye and a way of wearing his clothes that set the Mayor's sons by the ears. He had the lower floor of an old narrow house on the river, and at high tide the bowsprits of the barges used to knock the sandy cat off his window-sill. It was a queer cat, and it always swam ashore with no more fuss than a duck. There was more than one queer thing about that house, what with the Widow Macmurchison on the first floor and old Berry under the roof. And now there it was with a leprechaun loose in it and they not knowing.

Denis hunted for the jumping glow-worm all over the room on his hands and knees, and the sandy cat sat and smiled at him under its whiskers. Trust a sandy cat for knowing the ups and downs of things.

"The devil's in the box" cried young Denis, for he had hit his head against the table, "or maybe one of those luminous flies the mayor saw in the Indies." And with that he coiled up all his spare fiddle-strings as neat as you please and put them in the box. Then he blew out his candle and sat in the window, with the tide fingering on the wet gray stone under him and the stars coming out above. He would sit there for an hour singing songs that he hoped Dorothy Macmurchison on the first floor might give an ear to. He had no more thought of leprechauns in his brown head than he had of sorrow; that was little enough.

And all the time there was the leprechaun hopping upstairs, and he not knowing.

While young Denis was at "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms," with French flourishes, and little Mistress Dorothy was sighing in the room above, the leprechaun went hopping upstairs. By this and that he came to old Berry's door and opened it and went in, like a little green flame along the dusty floor.

Old Berry was wanting. He always lived in his little room under the roof, and went with the house when it changed hands. He spent most of his time making verse he could never finish, and sometimes he went out and gathered ferns and the red sheep-sorrel that grows among buttercups. He was too old to be surprised at anything, and when he saw the leprechaun he just said "Good evening to you, and my thanks for shutting the door behind you, for the draught's cruel."

"Good-evening to ye," said the leprechaun, all at home and friendly, "good-evening to ye, and a pleasant star to sleep under. And what may ye be doing with your time now?"

"Making songs," said old Berry, "but they won't come out right nor end on the good word."

"Won't they, now?" answered the leprechaun. "There's nothing I like better than songs, and I know a many. What might that song be about that's under the heel of your hand this living moment?"

"Tears and dew," said old Berry, rubbing his head, "two things that look much alike but someway taste differen."

"I know nought of the first, but of the last, what could be sweeter? And what's the chune of your song?"

"It was a long time ago, and I've forgotten why, but this is the tune of it:

" ' When I left the green hills and fared my feet away,
All my heart went down to earth on every falling leaf,
And in among the faded fern, the little dew was gray
As the gray tears of grief—'

tears and dew, sir, you see."

"Go on with your chune," says the leprechaun.

" ' Maybe when I'm older and it's short from sun to sun,
Days I'll dream of lying there with all the stars above,
While in among the sorrel bloom . . . "

"And it ends there," said the old man, helpless, "which it shouldn't, and it is in my mind that there is a fine bright word for it to end on, a word I've forgotten, and I can't finish it."

"I'm not here for long, but I'll come back before I go and finish your chune for you," and the leprechaun nodded very friendly and went out. What he did in the night Great-Aunt Hawthorne didn't know. But while Denis was finishing breakfast in the morning, he came into the room with the sandy cat.

"Holy Saints!" said Denis, and sat with a spoon full of strawberry jam held half way to his mouth, and his mouth open.

"Whist with your staring," cried the leprechaun, and he took Denis by the wrist very testy, and sent the spoon into his mouth with a clap. "I've but looked in for a minute to give you a hint with your affairs, and all you can do is to stare like a heifer in a fairy-ring."

"Comment," said Denis Duchesne, as well as he could for the spoon, "and what may you know of me and my affairs, for example?"

The leprechaun smiled, and the sandy cat smiled. "I saw your dreams go past me in the night," said the leprechaun. "There were the silver dreams of youth, and the golden dreams that are dreams for ever, and there were dreams as red as the briar rose that grows under the green

hill. And they were all of them beating and fluttering about the bright head of a girl. And a good girl she is, with a light foot on her and a skin like the new milk that creams at the lip of the pail on a frosty morning. But the Widow . . . " and the leprechaun winked.

"O, the Widow," groaned Denis.

"Whist with your groaning." The leprechaun began to waver and flicker like a little green flame before it goes out. "Take what's given you and good may come of it. Denis, boy, take my word for it, you'll find all your fiddle strings broken."

And with that there was Denis, and nothing in front of him, but the sandy cat sitting with its tail round its paws, and the pot of strawberry jam.

Denis was in a great taking. The hair of his head stood up like gorse on a common, the way he tore at it, and he went all round and about the room hunting for the leprechaun. He thought he was mad, with the leprechaun and the talk of Dorothy and all. But by this and by that, and the sight of the sandy cat sleeping under the table, he quieted down and went to look at his fiddle. And there was every string, even the silver G, broken at the bridge.

Young Denis said, "The devil's in everything," and took out the broken strings and put in new ones from the bog-wood box. He had no more than tuned the fiddle than there was a knocking at the door. That was the quality come for the dancing lessons. And they knowing nothing about the leprechaun.

The first to come in was the mayor's wife, a tall woman with a hard eye and a mouth so thin it puzzled Denis how his worship ever had the heart to kiss her. She had her three daughters, and they dropped three great round haughty curtseys to poor Denis bowing in the doorway with his fiddle under his arm and the jam spoon sticking out of his tail-coat pocket, where, in his hurry, he had thrust it. Then old Captain Vandeleur came in with his two nieces that he never let from under his eye, and they but plain girls, and they would have nothing to do with the Mayor's daughters, but went past them in a rustle of lilac chintz and their noses in the air. Then there was the young man from the apothecary.

cary's who was allowed in to open the door and practise his steps in the corner. And last there was the Widow Macmurchison, with a black front and an India shawl, watching young Denis with an eye like a fish's, and Dorothy coming in behind her like the breath of the morning, and Denis's heart kept time to the tune of her little feet on the floor.

But she went past him with her eyes hidden, and there was no more than a "Good-morning to you, Monsieur Duchesne," and a "B'jour, Ma'amselle Dorothee," and never a touch of her hand to put him in tune for his work. So it was with a long face that Denis tucked his fiddle under his chin. "Take your places for the new figure, mesdames, if you please," he said, wearily.

When all the pretty feet were pointed and all the pretty eyes fixed on Denis, he counted: "One, two, three," and began to play on his little fiddle. And at the first note it was as if a happy wind went through the room, and voices went with the wind.

"For the first note," said Great-Aunt Hawthorne, "was memory, and the next love and the third laughter." Never was such a tune. Denis played like a man in a dream, with flying fingers, but in truth the music came from the strings that had lain in the bog-wood box, whether he would or no. And presently the Widow Macmurchison clapped her hand to the India shawl, and "O, my heart," she cried, "my heart and my youth!" Old Vandeleur put his hat under his chair at the word, and they went off footing it down the room like a pair possessed. The apothecary's young man came out of the corner, his eyes all lost and shining, and he took the mayor's youngest daughter and they danced too, light as the flame dances in the ling, she laughing low and the pride gone out of her face. The other girls were dancing together like wild-wood things, all a flutter of roses and ribbons, and their feet might have been shod with swallow's wings. Their faces were bright and strange, and it was as if the music played in their hearts the tune of all happiness that had been, of all laughter that was to be. Never was such a tune.

For there was a more wonderful thing let loose in the room

than ever the leprechaun was, and that was youth. The music was in their feet and the music was in their hearts. Little Mistress Dorothy danced up to Denis like a leaf in a warm wind, and her eyes were raised at last, and shone into his like stars in a merry heaven. She said no word, but she tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow and they danced off together. The measure they danced was different, and the music they heard was different, for there was grief in it and a shadow, as there is in all great things. The sweet wind and the voices seemed to follow them.

"Is there a light shining on dove's wings?" said Dorothy in a dreaming voice.

"I see nothing but the light in your eyes."

"Do you hear a beat of tears in the music?"

"I hear nothing but the beat of your heart," said Denis as he played.

"Do you see a falling of leaves?"

"I see nothing but the flowering of the rose that folds the world," and they danced on.

"That's a work well finished," said the leprechaun, who had been listening at the keyhole. And he hopped upstairs thoughtfully to old Berry's room.

Old Berry was lying very quietly on his bed in the bright morning sunlight, with sheep-sorrel in his hand, and his age was heavy on him.

"I've brought the bright word for the song," said the leprechaun, sitting like a little green flame on the bed-post, "the song of the tears and the dew."

"Have you, now?" whispered the old man. "Then I take it very neighbourly of you, for I have never come to finish it. And what's the bright word that will be the end of it?"

"I'll finish your chune for you," said the leprechaun,

" 'Maybe when I'm older and it's short from sun to sun,
Days I'll dream of lying there with all the stars above,
While in among the sorrel bloom the little dew will run
Like the white tears of love.' "

Love's the bright word."

"A good word, a bright word for the end of a song," said

old Berry, and he fingered the sheep-sorrel and slept, with the leprechaun watching him. Soon the leprechaun slipped from the room, for there was that in it he might not abide. He went down the stairs like a little flame and the sandy cat followed him. The pair of them went down the gray street together in the morning, and it's a hard question which was the wiser. But they went, and no more was seen of them.

And in the room on the ground floor, said Great-Aunt Hawthorne, they were at their dancing all day long.



FRIENDS



FRIENDS

“WHY did you hit that white-headed kid?”

This was Loch's first recorded remark in reference to Jimsy Lewis. The answer was not unreasonable.

“A kid like that is made to be hit.”

But there are other lights than that of reason. “Well you are not to hit him. That kid is my friend. When we are grown up, he is coming with me on adventures”

They grew up, with the tenacious vitality of the Scotch-Canadian, in spite of the adventures. At nineteen Loch was six-foot-one, slant-shouldered, silent as an Indian, and, according to his aunts in Caledoniaville, of an affectionate disposition. His people started him in a bank in the very-far West, and Jimsy went with him. But the bank was only “held up” twice, so Loch found it dull, and went. He took Jimsy. Then,—it happened some years ago,—he enlisted in Somebody's Horse, and went to South Africa for the war. He took Jimsy. When I say that he took Jimsy, I mean it; he took him as a cyclone takes a barn-roof.

They and a man from Wolf Creek were separated from their troop, held a kopje for a week; were captured by an angry commando, escaped, and arrived in Kimberley in nice time for the siege. When the war was over, the man from Wolf Creek took up land in Natal to raise pineapples. Jimsy rather liked the idea of pineapples; but Loch was gathered in by the railway, and took Jimsy. When I say the railway, I mean the Great Railway, vision of a great man. Their work pushed them further and further north, into a new Africa, an enchanted Africa of high forest and grass-plain; of a vertical sun and frosty nights. They learned the blessing and the bitterness of work. They lived through that rainy season which came a month late, when the green jungle grew over the right-of-way, as it seemed, in a night;

and the elephants tore down the telegraph wires, and the fever followed the rain; and the black men grew weary of cutting and carrying fuel, so they sat them down and died. Jimsy was clever at many things; he was given charge of a siding, a telegraph instrument, six account books, and two assistants, of sorts. Loch had no gift but that of handling men, which made him so much more valuable than Jimsy that he was presently put in charge at Gondoko. For one dry season they saw nothing of each other—Jimsy bullied his assistants, collected butterflies, and thought of Loch. Loch did not think nearly so much of Jimsy, he was too busy.

But every Saturday night he went into Gondoko and wired Jimsy—"Are you all right, kid?"

"All right, Loch."

Then would follow gossip of the great line,—lions, a wash-out, a plague of witch-doctors. But the end was invariable as the beginning—"Let me know if you want me, kid, and I'll come."

"All right, Loch."

"So long, Jimsy."

"Good-night, Gondoko."

Then Loch would stumble to his mud-and-iron hut and sleep in peace, a gun loaded with bird-shot under his head in case of leopards.

The second year of his sojourning, Loch had trouble with ju-jus,—more trouble than usual. He also had fever—worse than usual. But the ju-jus worried him most. No. 537, pulling out from a siding, had cut down a string stretched across the line, from which fluttered a red rag and two guinea-fowl feathers. As a result, the black people fled to their forests, and the wood-piles shrank to nothing. Fuel had to be brought from afar until the ju-ju was pacified, which took time. There is no space to tell how Loch managed this by setting up an opposition ju-ju, in whose constitution a home-made magic-lantern played a chief part. But he went into Gondoko one Saturday night with the happy knowledge that he had put the fear of all the devils into his section, and that the wood-piles at the rail-side grew like mushrooms.

It was the third week of the stormy season, and Loch was soaked in fever ; the ju-ju war had tired him in body and soul. He looked at the sky, and as he looked the moon showed like a plunging white disk amid driving steam ; he thought how often he had seen it so, above the northern lakes of his boyhood, when the first snow came down from the north and the wild-geese had flown south. But Huron's cold surf was far from the station at Gondoko. And the glimmer of light shone only on the nameless uplands, the drenched scrub of the north ; and southwards, welt on welt, league on league, the roll of the African forest like a sea.

His right-hand-man, an escaped convict, met him and touched his cap. "A call from Mr. Lewis, sir."

Loch frowned. He had forgotten it was Saturday night, forgotten Jimsy, forgotten everything but his own overwhelming need of food and sleep. The ground rocked under his feet, and the ex-convict wavered like a smoke. "Did he leave any message ?"

The ex-convict, who was also a deserter, saluted. "No sir. In fact, something's wrong with the line. Probably helephants, sir. Williams took it, but nothing came through but the word 'Lewis,' sir, and the Gondoko call."

"Thank you." Loch went slowly to the iron shed, and sat down to the instrument. He called,—"*Lewis, Lewis, Lewis,*" in his clumsy fashion, now clumsier than usual, in that his fingers seemed to be as big and stiff as pincushions. He called for several minutes, waited, and called again. He was beginning to forget about the fever and the weariness.

The instrument clattered, stammered, hesitated. At last the answer—"Is that you, Gondoko ?"

"Yes. Gondoko. Gondoko. Have you got that ? Gondoko. Is that you, Jimsy ? Jimsy, is that you ?"

A space of meaningless clickerings and stutterings. Then suddenly, clear and sharp, "Loch, I want"

And then silence.

Loch sat for perhaps five minutes, patiently calling. But the silence was unbroken. He sat for another five minutes, thinking ; and the burden of his thoughts was a little white-headed boy who used to follow him round the school playground, saying, "Loch, I want you, Loch." Often the little

boy was smitten for his pains, but no other boy dared smite him. Loch went out on the platform and shouted. The convict-deserter, who was presently known as Hatch, came running.

"Is there anything with steam up?"

"Number eight, she has steam up." Hatch spoke proudly.

Number eight was a complex-compo-compound loco, collected from scrap heaps of half a continent, and put together at Gondoko.

"She's to pull out, with sheet-iron for Banda, at midnight or thereabouts."

"Uncouple, then," said Loch, curtly, "I want her."

"Mr. Lewis in trouble, sir?"

"I'm going to see." Loch spoke more curtly than ever, but his men knew him.

Hatch spoke persuasively. "You'd better have me to fire for you, sir. I'm off duty, and there hasn't been no variosity, sir, so to say, for a month."

Loch nodded. "All right. And bring your twelve-bore."

Hatch beamed and fled. There were outcries and footsteps. Loch spent another five minutes thinking of the little boy who had grown into a young man, and who might have been peacefully and safely raising pineapples in Natal. He started, as Number eight swung on the switch and pulled up beside him, groaning in all her rivets, Hatch swinging joyously on the rickety footplate.

"Clear line for four hours, sir," said Hatch.

"We shan't need so much," answered Loch; and Hatch, seeing his face, said no more, but went through silent movements of whistling.

They crawled out of Gondoko, clattering and banging. The open line lay before them, straight as a ruler between walls of forest, varied only by the paths of the woodcutters. Outside the radius of number eight's headlight was a swinging, uncertain darkness. Loch steadily put the throttle over. And Hatch whistled again.

Presently, he had no time even to whistle. He was stoking furiously.

Number eight roared up the line, rocking over the faulty

rivetting like a ship on a wave. Her ill-assorted parts groaned and rattled as if they would fly apart. Loch, peering through the glass, saw nothing but the reeling glimmer of steel running liquidly towards him, heard nothing but a boy's voice crying, "Loch, where are you, Loch? Loch, I want you" But Hatch had time to hear many things, for he knew and revered Number eight.

"'Ard on the old lady, this is," he said to himself, brushing the sweat out of his eyes.

A squall drove down, blinding the glass, and sending a surf of mud into the cab. It ended in a roll of thunder like the roll of a war-drum, and lightning that splashed on the rails like a thrown egg. It showed the forest and the sky, violet-white picked out in jet. Then the darkness shut down again, so swiftly that Hatch winced as he had not from the flash. But Loch's steady hand did not move on the throttle.

"'Ard on the old lady," muttered Hatch again, mournfully. "I knew this was a bad bit o' track, but she's runnin' as if her wheels was square."

The rain ended, the thunder rolled into the distance. But still, at regular intervals, the world was dipped and drenched in the unbearable brilliance of the lightning. Hatch began nervously to time the flashes. He saw a vivid vision of little buildings, the iron roofs blazing like silver, streaming past, and of the black silhouettes of the men on the platform. He saw the dripping leaves flashing back the electricity like looking-glass. He saw a sinuous shadow that shrank and fled by the left driving wheel. "'Passengers,'" he said, "'is forbidden to cross the line except by the over'ead bridge,' but this ain't the London-and-South-Western, thank Gord." He took a glance at the gauge, and stoked, stoked, stoked. His mouth was so tightly screwed into the form of whistling, it seemed unlikely ever to come unscrewed. It was quite stiff when he ventured to address Loch's immovable back.

"Lions is out," roared Hatch. "Or something."

Loch caught the words and nodded over his shoulder. The grade was mounting, and number eight rattled and rocked worse than ever. They were both powdered white to the hair with woodash. Loch's face looked gray in the light-

ning flash, his every nerve and sinew strained to snapping point, as he strove to fire the clamouring iron beneath him with the hurry of his own soul.

The wheels sang, monotonously, "I want you, Loch, I want you, Loch." "I'm coming, Jimsy," he answered. "I'm coming, Jimsy, as fast as I can." And he did not know that he spoke aloud. The fever ran over him in waves, and at the crest of every wave was a picture,—a picture of Jimsy deserted and stricken with illness; a picture of Jimsy sitting cowed over the telegraph instrument, speared through the heart, as he had once seen a man sit; a picture of Jimsy injured, of Jimsy possibly poisoned, of Jimsy most impossibly drowned. He shut his eyes an instant, groaning; "I'm coming, Jimsy, I'm coming" And on the words came the crash.

It was a crash too great for the senses, a crash that struck at life itself, maiming and bruising it. Loch plunged downwards into rushing darkness, full of burning steel, steam, woodcoals, and flashes of fire and lightning. He seemed to have suddenly grown into something very small and light, which floated in the reeling dark for a long, long time. Then something sprang out of the dark and hit him. The last thing he saw was a blaze of white light and a tuft of grass, very clear and distinct, with a huge silver moth clinging in the heart of it.

He came to himself, in darkness, but it was a darkness blessedly cool and wet. Someone was kneeling over him, striking matches, and presently he saw that it was Hatch. The match-light flared pink for an instant, and showed the ex-convict's face, black and grimy, save for two little white patches under the eyes, which were glaring at Loch, indig-nantly.

Loch sought for words, but couldn't remember what he wanted to say for some time.

"Hatch, your face looks kind-of-lop-sided—"

"Thank you, sir." Hatch's voice was piercingly sarcastic. "Which it ain't wonderful, sir, considering I fell on it. And my mouth full of sand and things. Probably beetles."

Loch stretched out a hand, slowly, and gasped at the pain.

"What's happened?"

"Wreck, sir." The lightning glared in the south-west, and Hatch bent over him, very gently wiping his face with a lump of cotton-waste.

"Wreck?"

"Yes. Young tree across the line; probably lightning, as it was all afire. Number eight, sir,—” Hatch's voice broke,—“there ain't enough of her left to make a penny toy.”

Loch lay still, trying to steady himself. “Is the line clear?”

“As far as I can see—Darn it, I can't stop your 'ead bleeding—Number eight, she kicked the tree off, and then fell on top of it herself. We must have flew like birds.”

“And how long have I been lying here?”

“Probably forty minutes, but there's no knowing. Just beyond Banda, we are, and we'll have to walk back. And the woods is fair crawling with things. Probably ferocious.”

“My fault, Hatch”

“Shut your 'ead.” Hatch swabbed away with the cotton waste. “Why—why, my lad—I thought you was done for—” His voice broke again, and he pulled himself together. “Now, if you think you can get up,—with the help of my arm—”

Loch staggered to his feet. The night swung about him, pierced with fires of pain. He thought it was the earth that reeled, and did not know that Hatch was holding him erect by main strength. He took a few steps, and a little strength came back.

“That's better, sir,” said Hatch, who had again taken refuge in sarcasm. “Keep it up, and we'll be in Banda for lunch.”

“Banda?” said Loch. “O, but we're not going back to Banda, Hatch. We're going on.”

“Going on”

“Why, yes.—Can't you tie that stuff round my head? Take the sleeve of my coat, then.”

“The sleeve's wet, too. You're pretty well cut about. I'll rip out mine Did I understand you to say, sir, as we were going on to Mr. Lewis?”

"Yes. It's not much further than Banda. I'll be all right."

Hatch opened his mouth, gasped, and was silent. The situation was beyond speech—even beyond swearing. Loch interpreted his silence.

"You needn't come, Hatch," he said, quietly.

Hatch found his voice. "Thank you, sir," he replied, bitterly. "My neck is to be broke, and I'm to be insulted into the bargain. And well you know that I don't care a darn for lions or niggers, but only for the 'orrible crawly things that drops on you. And probably stingers." He carefully adjusted the bandage round Loch's head. "Stingers. And probably down your back."

Loch laughed, croakily. "Tie the other sleeve round your neck, and come on."

He turned up the long track, wondering why ties were so hard to walk on, and why they seemed to be set at such irregular intervals. Two short steps and a long, two long steps and a short, a rest—"Loch, I want you. Loch, I want you."—He heard nothing but that, saw nothing but the glimmer of the wet steel he must follow. And Hatch, after one wild gesture that took to witness the flashing sky, the wet woods, and the ruins of Number eight fuming by the right-of-way, limped after him, his mouth screwed into a dolorous whistle.

A fair young man, with nice blue eyes, was sitting at a table, pleasantly and peacefully sticking dead beetles on pins. The light of a shaded lamp shone on his quick fingers, on the jewelled wing cases of his prey, and out of the screened window before him, in a long beam. Now and then he murmured Latin words, and scribbled on little slips of paper.

A fox-terrier and a black boy lay asleep in one corner of the room.

Suddenly the black boy sprang up, and the dog began barking furiously. And there came into the room what might have been the blood-stained ghosts of two men.

"Loch!" cried Jimsy, and leaped forward.

But Loch held him off. "So you are all right?" he said

thickly. "Sure you're all right, Jimsy? I saw you—through the window."

"Of course I'm all right, old man," said Jimsy, staring blankly.

"But your message?"

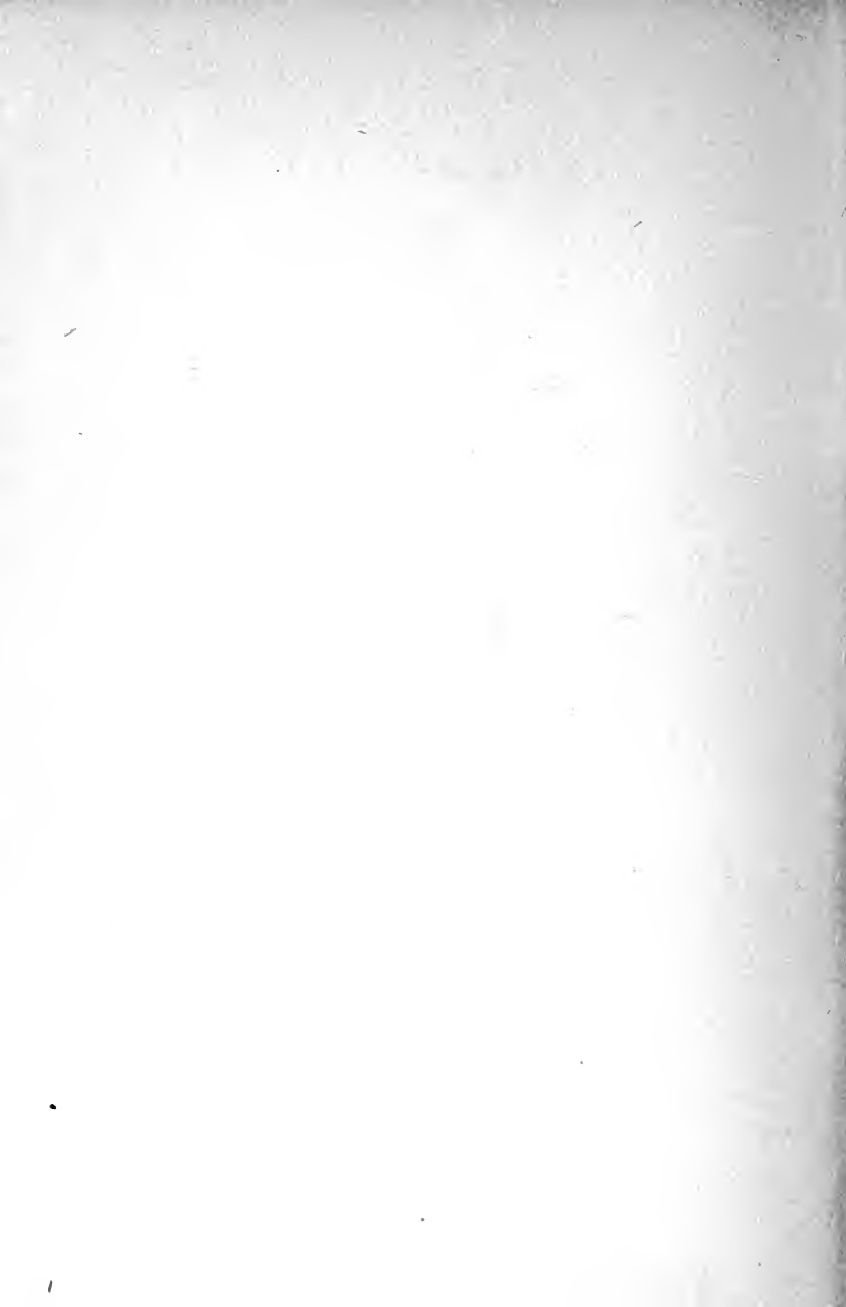
"My message. Loch? Good heavens, I only wired to ask you to send me up a bit of glass for my new butterfly case. And the wire gave out half-way through. Loch, I say. . . . Loch!"

Loch began to laugh with relief; it was a queer laugh that shook him from head to foot, and he held on to the table for support.

"But what's happened?" begged Jimsy. "What have you been doing? Loch!"

"Nothing's happened, kid," said Loch, soothingly. "Only I thought you wanted me. And so I came—I came—as fast as I could."

"Look out, sir," cried Hatch, sharply. But the table was in the way and Jimsy was not quick enough to catch Loch. It was into Hatch's arms that he fell.



SAGA OF KWEETCHEL

SAGA OF KWEETCHEL

KWEETCHEL was a young man when it happened and that was before the days when the red canoe and the Sitka Spruce had brought numbers of white men to his part of the world. Kweetchel had seen very few white men ; and he had never seen a compass until he took one from the body of a dead sailor he found in a drifting boat.

He was out in the summer fog, fishing for halibut with bits of octopus-arm for bait, and the boat came sideways out of the fog, and rubbed gently against his dug-out, and he looked in and saw the dead sailor.

There was nothing on the white man but a twist of tobacco and the compass. While Kweetchel was wondering what he should do next, a sooty albatross screamed at him. His snam was an albatross, so Kweetchel took this to mean that he'd better have nothing to do with the boat or the dead man; he sent the boat off with a push and the fog shut down on it forever. But there seemed no harm in keeping the compass, which was in a bright brass case.

Kweetchel went ashore. He intended to give the compass to the girl he liked best—either Kolite or Oala. The trouble was he could not decide which he preferred. Oala's silver labret was nearly twice the size of Kolite's, but Kolite's eyes were soft and bright as deep river-water and looked kindly on Kweetchel.

He sat down to think it out, the compass in his hands, and his heart beat—Kolite ? Oalo ? Kolite ? Oalo ?

Then glancing at the compass in his hand Kweetchel saw that the needle pointed straight at Kolite's house.

This was not strange considering that Kolite's house was north of Kweetchel as he sat on the beach among the draw-up dug-outs and the barbed cod's heads and the fighting dogs. But of course he did not know this, and it came as a shock.

"My holy snam!" said Kweetchel, or gutturals to that effect, "but there is a strong spirit in this little box!" He decided that he would keep the compass himself. But he went immediately and made arrangements to marry Kolite as soon as possible.

Kweetchel took Kolite to wife, and very soon forgot all about Oala. He was very happy. Kolite was an excellent housewife as far as oalachan oil and preserved seaweed went. Kweetchel attributed his comfort to the spirit in the brass compass. He made a beautiful hutch for it to live in, of well-grained male wood greased black, inlaid with studs of shell, and incised with albatross wings.

The days went over Kweetchel and Kolite, the silvery North Pacific sun, the nights, and the great burning moons. The west winds which had last touched the eyes of lovers in the peony gardens of Japan, now touched as softly the eyes of Kweetchel and Kolite.

A sub-chief gave a great potlatch. Kweetchel was a dandy, and he had himself tattooed for the occasion in a design of conventionalized compasses. But the wounds inflamed. And when the day of the feast came, Kweetchel was a sick man. He lay on his bed with a fever, talking wild spirit-words, and Kolite fanned him with a cedar-bark fan.

The second day of the feast, Kweetchel's mind came back to him suddenly, and with it a great sense of fear and disaster. He heard from without the howls of the drinkers, the groans of the eaters, the weeping of the neglected children, the worrying of the dogs. He trembled with fear and weakness. He said to Kolite, "Bring me the hutch with the Thing inside. I must talk to that spirit."

Kolite brought the carved hutch, and covered her eyes with her mantle of green-and-black goat's hair while Kweetchel took out the compass. Kweetchel held the compass and turned it in his quivering hand; and the needle balanced, hesitated, and then hung true to the north.

Kweetchel crawled out of his house and stood and looked north.

A great white fog-belt hung low across the sea. Kweetchel saw three black specks break one after the other from

this fog. They were a long way off, but he knew them for what they were,—canoes under twin-sails. He watched a moment more. Then, with a great cry, he ran staggering to the potlatch house. He burst through the totem poles and flung himself, naked and shouting, on the revellers within. As men of Kent or Essex might have burst into an English hall, crying, "The Norsemen, the Norsemen!" so Kweetchel came, crying, "The Haidas, the Haidas!"

The crapulous rabble huddled to the defence. They tried to launch the war-canoes to meet the sea-hawks on the sea. Only one got off, and Kweetchel, for all his weakness, in her. Women fled to the fir-forest, all except Kolite. She climbed to a high rock above the beach, and wrapped her fine woven mantle about her, and sat as still as a stone, her chin upon her knees, watching the hopeless fight.

The Haida war-canoes came down under full sail, swift and beautiful among the beautiful boats that men have ever made in the world.

The canoe from shore, with drunken courage and a scattering fire of old muskets, put out to intercept the leading Haida. The Haida swept on, silent, until scarcely twenty feet divided the two. Then her sails came down, shots were fired, spears and stone-headed axes flew. In a moment from the other boat rose a great cry of pain, fear and death. The Haida's way carried her on. Her terrible sharp prow, with the great eyes glaring on either side, ground into the side of her adversary, which heeled over. The Haida was sixty feet long; she rode right over the smaller boat and beached on the sand leaving the living and the dying struggling in the water. The second canoe picked up a few of the former for slaves.

Then the slaughter commenced, of men too gorged to stand up, of men too drunk to steady a harpoon. Kolite did not stir while the sound of it, and then the smell of burning, went past her in a smoke.

Later, she heard feet running on the rock, the high rock whereon she sat. She covered her face with her mantle. A man came and stood by her, panting. He tore the mantle away. He said, "Who are you?"

As if she were dead, Kolite replied, "I was the wife of Kweetchel."

He took her in his arms and carried her down to the boats. He was gentle with her. Love for her had entered his heart when he uncovered her face. And Kolite looked among the other prisoners to see if her husband was there. But he was not. Then she lay down and it was as if her life went from her. Kweetchel was dead, and she was the slave to the Haida chief, Annoish-Haung.

But Kweetchel was not dead.

In the brief fight with the Haida, he was wounded and pitched into the sea. Swimming as instinctively as a wounded seal, he travelled under water while his breath held. He came up, gasping and half-dead, in the lee of a reef that sheltered him from sight.

He clung here a long while, too much hurt to have any clear thought of what was happening. Later, he recovered enough to swim back to shore. This took all his strength. He crawled dripping above tide-mark, and dropped, lying all night with other men, more still and silent than he, under the light of the vast Pacific moon.

The moon set. The sun climbed. Kweetchel woke and stood up.

He looked at the dead. He looked at the ruins of the burning houses. He saw the crows gathering from the woods, and the fierce herring-gulls swooping inshore. He knew then what had happened.

He ran up and down the beach, calling, "Kolite, Kolite!" But none answered him.

He ran into the forest, calling "Kolite!" There was no reply.

He walked two and fro among the burning boards of cedar, crying on "Kolite!" A huge totem-pole, charred through at the base, fell with a crash, scattering him with flakes of painted wood. That was the only response. He made his way to the smouldering ruin of his own house and lay down in the hot black ash, waiting to die.

His hands, beating about as his sorrow hurt him, touched wood that was not burned, and closed on it. He drew from the ashes the hutch that the compass lived in.

"Spirit of the bright box," groaned Kweetchel, "where is Kolite?"

He took out the compass and held it in his hands. The needle shook, quivered, and hung true on the north. . .

Kweetchel, with something hardening in his breast like stone, bowed himself and wept in the ashes of his home.

Then he hung the compass round his neck on a leather string, provisioned his own dug-out with a keg of fresh water, some nice fresh sea-urchins, a little smoked salmon, fishlines, spears, and all things necessary to a long journey, and went off after Kolite.

Kweetchel's account of what happened to him during the next two months is confused. He seems to have made his way right round Vancouver Island, however, and crossed to the mainland, where he hung about some inlet more-or-less opposite Clew Cumsheewa, waiting for a chance to cross to the Queen Charlottes. He knew Kolite was here, because the compass had pointed the way. It troubled him that the compass no longer pointed to the Queen Charlottes, but he decided that it had been bewitched by the powerful Haida spirits.

In a week of calm weather he provisioned his little canoe again, and set out for the Islands. He landed on the southern shore of a tiny bay, notched into a bigger bay, which was notched into a fjord. Enormous cedar-forest grew to the water's edge. Kweetchel hid his dug-out and lay down in the bushes, watching the unbroken forest on the opposite shore of the little bay, to which the compass needle now pointed. Rain dripped on him, made sweet with the layers of cedar through which it fell. He dared not light a fire. He waited for the event.

At the very edge of the night, something stirred in the cedar forest across the bay. He thought it was a deer; but there are no deer on the Haida's Islands. Lifting his head, he looked. At the very point the needle had indicated, a woman parted the branches and stood by the water, carrying in her hand a torch like a timid star.

Kweetchel's heart seemed to leap from his body. For it was Kolite.

Hunter as he was, he made no sound nor stir. He watched

her as she bent and extinguished her little torch. Then, a shadow among the shadows of the forest, she slipped out of the bright robes she wore, the robes of a Haida chieftainess. She stood bare and softly dark as the young night sweet with rain; on arms and anklets broad bands of beaten silver gleamed like bars of the moon. She entered the water, holding a knife in her hand, and began to make prayer to the Spirit of the Sea.

"O Scanawa, Un-Una," said Kolite, in very good Haida, "I entreat you to punish the men who killed my husband. I entreat you to rise, O Scanawa, Un-Una, Soul of Storms, and upset their canoes, and fill their nets with the dog-fish and the mother of the dog-fish, and drive the otter from their coasts, and bite holes in their baskets, and spoil their copper shields, and break their abalone shells. O Scanawa, Un-Una, hear me. I am a poor woman. I have nothing. I am nothing. I am the slave of Annoish-Haung. O Spirit of Storms, I give you all that I have. Hear me, Scanawa, Un-Una, and make Kweetchel alive again so that I no longer fear the emptiness of the night and the arms of Annoish-Haung." And lifting the knife, Kolite shore from her head the long locks of black hair, and let them fall in the salt water. She wept as she cut them, and there was a faint phosphorescence in the water, so that she stood with a silver ring about her waist, and her hair floated like silver snakes, and each tear as it mingled with the brine was like a spark of pale fire.

Then Kweetchel could no longer be still. He leapt into the water and swam across the little bay. When Kolite saw him coming she ran ashore and crouched on the edge of the forest. Kweetchel rose out of the sea and came to her, and said, "I am come, Kolite."

They had no words to fit what they felt. They sat near each other, they touched each other softly here and there, and smiled. Then Kweetchel said, "Come with me." Kolite swam with him across the bay, they found his dug-out. In the dim night, in the sweet rain, they put out to sea.

Kolite said, "Let us go home." But Kweetchel shook his head and paddled north, for that was the way the compass pointed.

An old woman had followed Kolite through the woods from the Haida town, had heard her prayer to Un-Una, had seen her meeting with Kweetchel. This old woman went back and told all that she had seen and heard to Annoish-Haung. And when in the morning light Kweetchel looked about the great silver disk of the sea, he saw, between him and the misty mountains of the Islands, four black specks beneath the rising cloud of dawn.

"He follows soon," grunted Kweetchel between his teeth, and bent to the paddle. He had been paddling all night. He must paddle longer. The glittering silver swell lifted the dug-out, she climbed, sank, climbed again. The four canoes pursuing altered course, converging like black ducks upon a stricken fish. Kweetchel's canoe had been seen.

"If we had a sail. . ." said Kweetchel stolidly.

Kolite stripped off her mantle of a Haida chieftainess, her fine-woven mantle of red and blue. She spread it upon spears. The wind filled it, she steadied it with her arms. The wind stung her body, she leaned back and laughed fiercely at Kweetchel, and he loved her as never before.

The canoe sped more swiftly, but the four big canoes of Annoish-Haung were swifter yet. Kweetchel looked back. Before they had been like low black ducks. Now they were like eagles, and the foam about their high prows was like the white feathers of an eagle's neck. Kweetchel groaned, bending over the paddle.

"Shall we leap in the sea together?" asked Kolite, child of the seas, laughing fiercely.

"I am a well-born man and my ears are pierced," panted Kweetchel. "I will die fighting Annoish-Haung."

There were islands in the sea. "If we hid among the small channels in the fog," whispered Kolite. But Kweetchel glanced at the compass and stolidly shook his head. The Thing still pointed north. North he went and Annoish Haung followed.

But now Kweetchel was spent with paddling. He glanced despairingly at the dim mountains of the Lak-Haida, at the canoes that hunted him down. His dark chest heaved, water ran down his face. Kolite left the sail and knelt beside him, and wiped the water from his face with her

hands. They looked into each other's eyes. Kolite tore from her arms the bracelets of beaten silver, stamped with the crest of Annoish-Haung, and threw them into the sea.

"O Scanawa, Un-Una," she cried, "hear us."

Then she shrieked like a gull and pointed.

Scanawa, Un-Una, Spirit of Storm, Soul of the Sea, had heard. Down from the tall mountains of Lak-Haida swept the squall. Between the small boat and the others two miles astern it drove a sudden wedge of hail and wind. The waves lifted. The air and the sea mingled together. Un-Una reached up and shook the canoes of Annoish-Haung and the souls of the men in them. Kolite seized the paddle, and Kweetchel reeled forward and stayed the sail. He looked up and saw an albatross riding the gale like a ship. Behind the Soul of the Sea fought for them. Kweetchel bowed his head. It is not given to all men to walk with the gods of the sea.

The squall broke away south. The sea about them was driving green and blue, flashing with foam. One staggering shape, water-logged and with torn sails reeled from the rim of the storm and came battling after them. Annoish-Haung still followed.

Under the bright sail, with Kolite bending at the paddle, the little canoe climbed the waves like a duck. Grimly behind her laboured the big canoe of the Haida. Annoish-Haung set his slaves to bail. She lightened each moment. Kweetchel took the paddle once more.

North through the bright ridged sea they struggled, following the compass needle. Islands of refuge, channels of escape, showed here and there among the low clouds. Kweetchel would not turn aside. North he headed. And Annoish-Haung followed fast.

Ahead of them, a great crag reared from the running surf about its base. It roared into an islet of honey-gold rock, grown with vivid green moss and all hollowed by the sea. An hour passed and they could see the sea-lions thick along the reefs as grubs along a leaf; they could hear the roaring of the honey-brown sea-gulls mingle with the roar of the foam.

Towards the crag Kweetchel headed. And Kolite thought,

"It is ended." For she thought he meant to dash upon the crag and die.

But Kweetchel, following where the needle pointed, saw due ahead a great cave in the rock, and in the surf before it a break.

He glanced back. The Haida was near, but she hesitated. He could see Annoish-Haung beating his slaves, who had no stomach for the surf. Kweetchel smiled at Kolite and headed for the break in the reefs.

Inevitable as life or death, the jaws of the reef opened before them. They were enclosed in streaming rocks, from which hung curtains of bronze kelp. From the ledges the sea-bulls reared to look, and right and left the cows dived in the flow.

Kweetchel yelled. The lions bellowed. The surf thundered about the narrow channel of green water. . .

They were through. A great sheet of foam shouldered them quietly into the cave.

Kweetchel looked about him. Rocks buttressed the entrance, and the reefs kept the waves from it. The pool in the cave was foam-red and shallow. He stepped out and drew the canoe behind one of the rock-buttresses. He lifted out Kolite. Clinging together, they looked about them with large scared eyes.

It was a very still place they had entered, though it hummed and shook to the thunder along the reefs. The air of the cave was calm, it seemed to be hung with strange green water-shadows and reflections of the deep. The pool that floored it was calm. The rock beneath the calm pool was covered with a rose-red encrustation, blotched with scarlet, hung with mauve and bronze weeds, and starred with living flowers as green as emerald. Huge crabs, noduled with purple and crimson, moved with the undulations of the sea. In one wall was a rose-pink recess, like a throne for a sea-spirit. Kweetchel lifted Kolite and set her in this shrine. Then he caught up a spear, loosed the knife in his belt, and turned to the entrance.

As he turned, he heard a cry of death. He looked out. The hands of the weary slaves had not been as true as his hand. He saw the Haida swing for the opening of the reef,

and miss it. He saw, in a moment of time, her high prow crashed upon the rocks ; she split from end to end, slid away, and sank. The slaves went down in the rush and smother of the foam. Only one man, gripping a spear in his mouth, leapt clear ; hung to the kelp, heaved himself upward among the herd of sea-lions, and staggered towards the cave. It was Annoish-Haung.

¶ Huge, dark and dripping from the sea, he splashed into the cave, and Kweetchel met him there.

They closed at once, stabbing with shortened spears. The water of the pool rocked, green and silver reflections flowed over the walls. The surf thundered outside, and the bulls of the sea-herd bellowed angrily after the man who had run among them.

Kweetchel kept his knife hidden in his left hand.

Great and fierce was Annoish-Haung among the great fierce Haidas ; fair in colour, and delighting in war. Kweetchel was a head shorter, and swarthy, and had no more stomach for war than another man. But he had not followed Annoish-Haung nine weeks for nothing. Waiting his chance, he took many wounds. The froth on the churned pool was stained as pink as the walls. The crabs, pausing in their unceasing run, winnowed the water with horrid feathered jaws.

Annoish-Haung shouted his war-cry and drove again with his spear. Kweetchel avoided it, and the impetus of the stroke carried Annoish-Haung past him. Kweetchel wheeled. The Haida wheeled almost instantly and recovered. But Kweetchel had seized his chance. He leaned forward and slashed his knife across the forehead under the studded head-band.

It was only a shallow cut. But the blood blinded Annoish-Haung. He faltered. Before he could clear his eyes, Kweetchel had run in and slashed his knee. He dropped to the other. He flung his spear, but he could not see clearly. It flew wide. Kweetchel speared him through the heart. He fell forward on his face in the pool, and died. Kolite came from her rosy niche and took him by the hair, and together they carried him to the opening of the cave and heaved him into the surf.

They spent three fireless days on the rock, eating sea-urchins and dulse, while Kweetchel, like another before him frapped his ship; for the dugout had been scraped on the reef; and Kweetchel bound her together with strips of sea-lion hide, and braced her with splinters of Annoish-Haung's canoe which the tide washed up. Then, suffering badly from thirst, they put off again.

"Now we can go home," said Kolite, shivering in her mantle.

Kweetchel thought it about time. He looked at the Thing, but it still pointed implacably north. He dared not disobey a spirit that had done so much for him.

So he paddled stolidly north once more.

He paddled forty-eight hours in a rough sea against a north-wester. The dug-out made water badly. They were nearly dead when they fell in with a trading-schooner, and the captain took them on board. He could speak some Haida, and Kolite was able to tell him some of their story. At the end of it,—“Where do you want to go now?” he asked them.

“We want to go home,” said Kolite.

“But we have to go north,” said Kweetchel sadly, “because the Thing inside this shining box points us there.” And he showed the sacred compass to the captain.

The captain began to laugh. He laughed and laughed. Then, looking at their faces, he grew grave. He looked at the compass. He said gently, “but it points south.”

“North, Yetzhabada,” answered Kolite, resignedly.

“But south too,” insisted the white man.

Of course when one end of the needle pointed north, the other pointed south. Kweetchel had never happened to notice this before. It made him very happy. He could go off home with Kolite without fear of angering the masterful Thing in the bright box.

The captain took them south with him and eventually landed them near their old place, at a village of their own tribe. He tried on the voyage to explain the real nature of the compass to Kweetchel, but he never succeeded.

Kweetchel stayed with his own people. In time missionaries found him, and he stopped keeping slaves and

eating dog, and became a Christian, and wore a second-hand Stetson. He himself told me this story years ago.

He was a very old man then. I thought he was dead since. But the other day I saw a little totem-pole in a store in Victoria. It was carved of yellow cedar, about two feet high, gaily painted; such as old Indians make to sell to the summer tourists on the Coast. As soon as I saw it, I knew Kweetchel had made it, for he had carved it with all the characters of his saga. He was there, and Kolite, and a sea-lion, and the big canoe and the little canoe, and an albatross, and a terrible representation of Un-Una, in a cave, swallowing up Annoish-Haung. On the very top was something. . . .

I went into the store. They wanted ten dollars for the pole, which was dear. "But, as you can see," said the man, "it has a heap on it. But no one knows what that thing on the top is."

I bought the pole, because I knew all about it and what the thing on the top was.

It was a mariner's compass in a yellow box.

Snam—Guardian spirit, "medicine."

Mother of the dog-fish—shark.

MANNERING'S MEN



MANNERING'S MEN

"IN that town," said Blake to himself, peering cautiously through the scrub, "is Mannering's grave, and the wreck of a brave man's life-work. O, Sergeant, if those two beggarly Nyam-Nyams try to run away, deal with them straightly. At moonset we will go down."

"O sons of Eblis," murmured the Haussa sergeant with a grin, "scum of the market-place, little frogs of the mud-puddles of Wakonda, in that town is good soured milk, much grain, and the chickens and goats as many as the prayers of the prophet. At moonset we will go down."

The command gurgled pleasantly to itself and lay closer. Blake crawled nearer Macartney, who was raking the silver-patched blackness with a pair of night-glasses wrapped in dark cloth.

"I can make out a tin roof," whispered Macartney at last; that will be the roof of the residency."

"Where Mannering was speared on his own door-step," said Jim Blake, taking the glasses. "Dead, down and dead, wiped out, absolute failure, Mannering. I can't get over that, you know. He was such a keen old beggar; so wrapped up in his work. He simply spent himself on this beastly country. And he cleared out Wakonda, as far as mortal eye can see, on purpose to make room for seven other devils worse than the late king."

"Couldn't be," put in Macartney.

"It's not being speared that's the worst part of it," persisted Blake; "we all come to that sooner or later. It's having absolutely nothing to show for his life or his death. Nothing even for the next man to build on. It's that," he continued, shivering as the dawn chill blew up the valley, "which I fancy must worry old Mannering—still."

"What you need is chlorodyne," whispered Macartney, indignantly.

They lay silent in the dark, upland grass, and the dew beaded and dripped on the thorns overhead. The command hunted for prickles in its feet, tightened belts, and babbled softly of stewed fowl.

From immense spaces, as spun out and as thin as a thread, came the hunting-cry of a lion. The Hausa sergeant crept up and touched Blake's foot.

"The moon sets, O Effendi, and it is not yet dawn."

Blake rose to his feet and looked at the sky. "We be ready," he said.

The command moved as one man, eyes glinting whitely under the tarbooshes. The last few days had been hungry ones. Below in the valley was good food; it was only to fight a little, and all would be full.

"Ya Illah, brethren, let us go down."

They went down. Blake was no tactician, and his plan in such cases was simple. You took the main gate, held it, and swept the obstructionists out of the other gates or over the mud walls, broom fashion. He had worked with his present command for a year, and they followed him like a football team. The sergeant at his elbow presently touched his sleeve.

"There is made ground here."

"Made ground?"

"Yes. The road built by Mannering Bimbashi."

Already the road built by Mannering for the grain dealers and spice merchants was no more than a track in the undergrowth, and the grass swept to the thigh. Their way dipped sharply, and a river valley swirling in mist took them like shadows. Blake felt under his feet the rotten piles of a bridge, and a rifle clanged against rusted iron.

"I think these cattle of Wakonda have the alarm," said the sergeant as they grunted up the opposite slope.

"Why?"

"There was a watchman at the bridge end; we should have crossed by the ford farther down. But these Wakonda cannot fight, and all is as Allah wills. O Ibrahim, son of

Suleiman, keep thy rifle dry and remember to get under the walls."

The town was clattering like a frightened hen-roost when a company of shadows flitted through the fog, and flung themselves under the walls and against the main gate. Five minutes of noisy, scrambling, hit-or-miss fighting followed, and they were inside, with their hardest work before them. Their fire had driven back the defenders, but they themselves had for the moment no cover. Presently the slugs began to flop on the walls behind them, and two men fell. Blake felt a stinging blow on the knee, and went down on all fours. He rose, laughing rather shakily into Macartney's scared face.

"A spent bullet," he cried in the din; "can't put my foot to the ground. Clear those houses, old man; I'll hold the gate."

Macartney nodded and was gone, his men after him. Blake and his handful took cover behind a mud buttress and a dead camel, and prepared to hold the gate. It was only then that Blake saw the sergeant.

"Why art thou here?"

"I stay with thee, O Effendi. Besides,"—he sniffed wistfully,—“in that house they have been cooking good mutton. I would not go too far.”

The din and turmoil of the narrow ways rose and fell like the froth of the sea. The roofs were beginning to burn in a dozen places as Macartney, in rough-and-ready fashion, cleared out the slug-shooters. The red light of burning thatch danced in the fog and the thinning dark, and by this light Blake saw a score of white-wrapped figures leap from the reek and rush for the gate, shouting as they came.

"Steady, men, steady!"

"By the prophet's beard!" cried the Hausa sergeant, flinging himself flat behind the camel, "these be no Wakonda, but ghazis of the far desert. Shoot well, O my children!"

It was all happening with the jerky rapidity of a cinematograph film, and the noise passed hearing. The command, inspired with visions of buttered mutton, loaded and fired as one man. Two, three close-range volleys swept between the walls, and the alley was blotched with whitish bundles that were the bodies of the desert men. But the others

came on, and suddenly Blake was on his feet in the shadow of the gate, fighting hand to hand for his life.

"Stand firm, O my children!"

The sergeant's voice echoed his. He was the centre of an indescribable confusion. Under the gate the smoke of the volleys hung heavily. Through this broke first one fierce face, then another, the gleams of arms, the surge and retreat of the attack, the blows and outcries of men. Ibrahim, the son of Suleiman, fell across Blake's feet and coughed his life out in ten seconds. Another of his best men was down, speared through the heart. And then, as suddenly as they had come, the desert men retreated to the shelter of the huts, and Blake, looking up, saw that it was day.

"They are gone," said the sergeant, looking at the dead, "but they will come again. O Effendi, this is no good place."

"I should have kept more men," Blake was thinking clearly and rapidly. "If Mac doesn't come back inside ten minutes, it will be too late for us, and he'll have to cut his way out."

A moment's dreamlike quiet had succeeded the dreamlike noise. Over his head the sky was clear and growing gold, barred with the black flocks of wild-fowl that flew to their feeding grounds in the valley. The sun rose with the hard flash of metal, and the blink of metal answered from the ruined roof of Mannering's house. Blake's breath drew cold. Was he also to die uselessly, wastefully, his work unfinished, under the spears of Wakonda? "Steady, men, steady, and fire slowly! It is ours to hold the gate."

The Hausa sergeant leaped to his feet.

"They come again! O jackals of the sands, we men are ready—"

"Silence—and lie down!"

Again with that dreaming sense of unreality Blake watched the rush of fluttering figures up the valley. The men were loading and firing as fast as they could, but the rush was scarcely checked. Someone behind him began to croon a wild death-song. A thrown spear flickered before his eyes and struck his head a glancing blow. He looked at it curiously as it clattered down on his boots, and wondered

why his hands felt so weak, and why the earth reeled under his feet like an outrolled ribbon. Then everything was lost in a warm red mist through which savage faces seemed to peer and yell. Blinded and dizzy, he braced himself for the shock of the charge, the while some voice in his head was buzzing busily, "you will go down as Mannering did, a failure, a failure . . ."

An utter pity for Mannering filled him. He leaned back against the wall, levelled his revolver as well as he could on his knee, and waited—as Mannering had waited.

"*Ya Allah!*" shouted the sergeant hoarsely. "Who be these?"

Blake cleared the blood from his eyes and looked. The attack had wavered and had turned upon itself, for a compact little force of ten had filed out from behind a house and fallen upon the desert men in the rear. They were in all degrees of dress and undress. Their leader was very tall and very thin, with a great bush of hair, upon which he wore the remains of a tarboosh, and he had an empty bandoleer round his neck. He and his were armed variously, ranging from a damaged Martini to an inlaid jesail from the North. These weapons they were using variously, in disciplined silence. So much Blake saw in a photographic flash of amazement. Then strength came back to him, and he and the sergeant flung themselves across the dead camel.

"Come on, you black rascals!" shouted Blake, staggering as he stood.

"Follow me, sons of darkness!" yelled the sergeant.

The men obeyed with howls. Caught between two forces, the enemy fighting like wolves, were driven down alleys, cut down in corners, scattered and broken. In five minutes Blake's men and their unknown allies were staring and panting under the gate, their work done.

"Now," suggested the Haussa, patting Blake all over with his delicate black hands in a search for fatal injuries—"now I go and picket that street whence came the cooking smell."

"Wait!" commanded Blake. He looked at the gate; at the dead lying in the light and the black shadows. Even now the gold had scarcely gone from the faint, hot blue sky;

scattered bands of birds still flew across it, and the high air seemed stirred with a multitude of wings. He looked at the leader of the allies, who was standing on one leg and grinning anxiously.

"Who art thou?"

The man drew his dusty heels together and carefully saluted.

"We be the men of Mannering Bimbashi."

"Of Mannering Bimbashi?"

"Yea, Master. I was a policeman of the force wherewith he policed this town. He said to us, 'Go here,' or 'Go there,' and we went and punished the evil-doers. Twice and thrice have I fought under Mannering Bimbashi." He gazed contemptuously at his command. "These others are also of his force, or of his house—warriors, as I am, or gardeners and herders of goats; but all Mannering Bimbashi's men."

"Go on," said Blake quietly.

"Mannering Bimbashi was slain, and many of his folk; but I was left. I remembered. I gathered these others together, and bade them remember also. Mannering Bimbashi was dead, but we were not freed from our service. We had to live. I was a seller of rock-salt in the market-place, and these others did work after their kind. Sometimes we met and spoke together. None knew us for his men, and his name might not be upon our lips; but we laid our hands upon our mouths—so—and then we remembered."

"Go on."

"There is no more. It is very difficult to remember. But I knew the English would come in the footsteps of our Bimbashi and I held these of his together in readiness, as thou hast seen. But our Bimbashi—on whom be peace!—has been dead a long time, and now we would take service with thee, O master."

"Thou hast done well." Blake's voice shook a little as he thought how well. "Thou hast done very well. But why?"

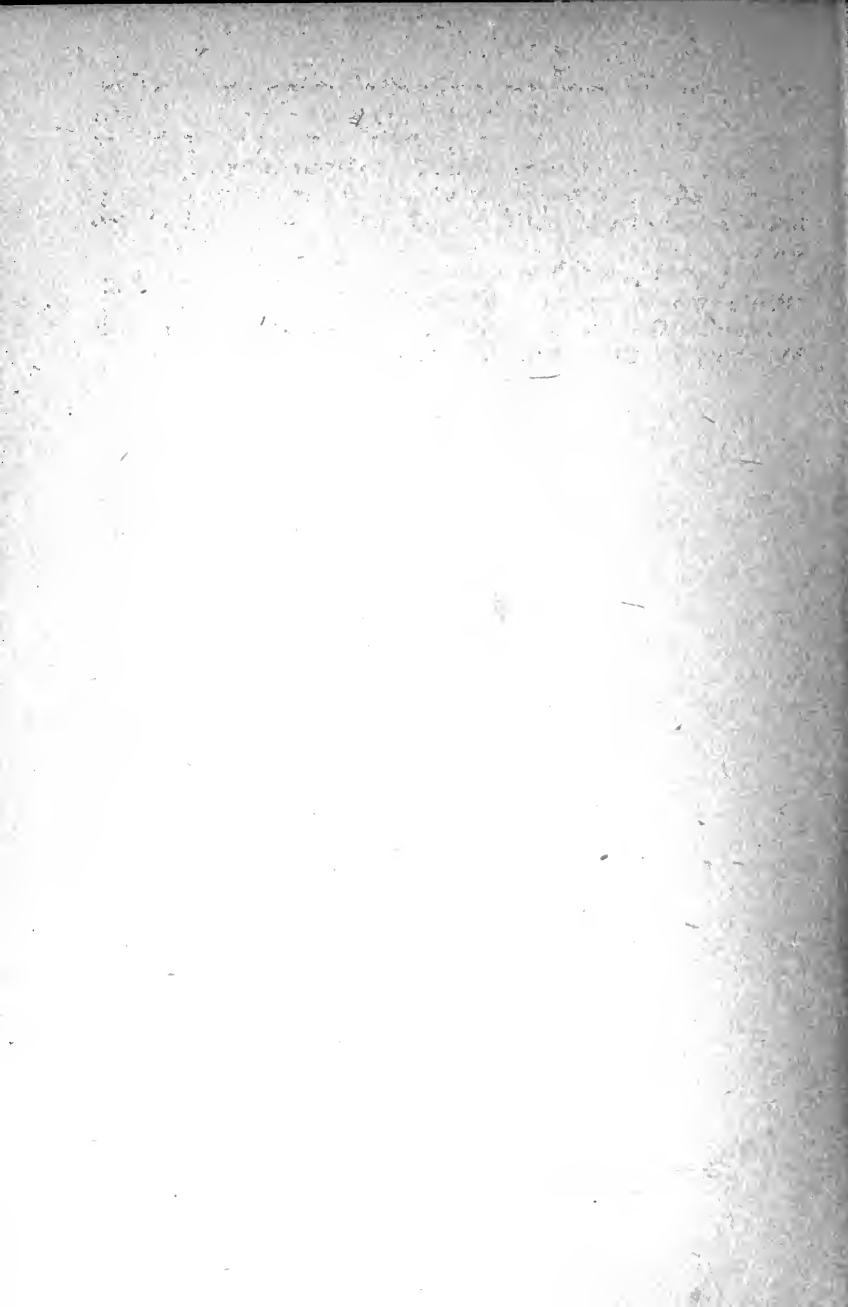
The man was very ugly and very black, but all the poetry and sadness of the Arab were in his face as he answered:

"We were his men. We loved him."

Blake's eyes were dim as he looked across at the ruined house. There, Mannering had gone down, and his hope, his work, his deeds—all these had gone down with him into dust.

“But even here there was love left,” said Blake aloud, with a kind of wonder; “even here there was love left!”

Then he took his men and Mannering's and went to join Macartney in the ordering of Wakonda.



HE THAT COMETH AFTER



HE THAT COMETH AFTER

ADMISSION was by ticket only, and Hillard wondered how and where the man sitting next him had obtained one. He was, in that decorously neutral assembly, as conspicuous in his way as a game-cock among crows. His coat was of some sort of greenish kahki, strapped, patched and pocketed over almost every available inch of its surface; his trousers did not fit him or the coat; his boots—Hillard could not see his boots, but he thought they were tan; his tie looked like a knotted red handkerchief; his hair was red, and he himself so scorched and reddened by sun that it seemed as if his cool grey eyes should have melted amid the fervent heat of his face. So much Hillard saw in his first casual inspection, as he sat awaiting boredom. After a bishop had introduced the speaker and the lecture had begun, he was too much interested in the slight black figure on the platform to spare much attention elsewhere. You know those bioscope pictures that show in a few minutes the life-cycle of a plant from seed to seed? Hillard says that Paul Raynor, with the aid of a magic lantern and his own simplicity, was showing them thus the birth of a seed of law and love, the growth of light in darkness, of safety in the shadow of death. Not a soul in the audience could remain quite unmoved.

It was about half-way through that Hillard felt a tug at his sleeve. The man in the khaki coat was leaning forward intently, his elbow on the back of the chair ahead and his hand at his ear.

"What did he say, mister?"

"I beg your pardon. When?"

The man lifted his hand impatiently. "Then. Before the last picture. I couldn't be sure . . ."

"Oh, he said he was probably the only man in the country who knew the language."

"Meanin' himself? Raynor?"

"Yes."

"Ah"—the man spoke with a certain jealous satisfaction—"so he thinks. But it ain't so. It ain't true."

"Indeed?" Hillard was curt.

"Nah. I know it."

Hillard looked at the interrupter who, quick as an animal to read a rebuff, had drawn away and was once more listening to the lecturer with a bitter intentness. Something made Hillard sorry he had been curt; so that when the audience broke up in unusual enthusiasm, and he found himself descending the stairs, shoulder to shoulder with the khaki coat, he followed the impulse of repentance and spoke.

"An uncommonly interesting talk, eh?"

"Interestin'?" The man eyed him warily. "Yes, I guess it was interestin' all right."

Hillard: "And you must have found it specially so knowing the country and the people."

They had reached the pavement, and the man swung round almost threateningly. "Who says I know the country?"

"Well, I thought it likely, as you said you knew the language."

"Ah, so I did, mister, so I did. . . And you was interested?"

"Why, yes. I think anyone would be. To see the school, the little thatched church, the neat fields, all grown up in a couple of years, and all the work of two white men. . . They're brave fellows out there; good men."

They had turned into the Park, pleasant with a sense of cool grass and damp borders. The man in khaki paused and sniffed luxuriously; the wariness had gone out of his face.

"Yes," he said, gravely, "they're good men. That man Raynor, now, he's a mix of holiness and horse-sense which you'd call uncommon. Yes, sir, uncommon. And all that good man has"—he turned suddenly and laid his hand on Hillard's arm—"all that good man has, all he's done, he owes to Brad Timmins, who weren't good in any sense o' the word. Queer, ain't it?"

Hillard took him deftly by the elbow, turned him to a bench, and said, "Go on."

It came something like this :

"We were days and days in the grass country, and that's a thing very bad for the nerves. You see nothing but grass, close-packed, stem and blade. We travelled blind as if we was in a tunnel, and the roof of the tunnel was the achin' sky. We'd brush through the grass as endless as water. And hot. . . Brad and I we quarrelled all the way up, and, what made it worse, we had to quarrel amiable. In a friendly voice, I mean, so the niggers wouldn't know. It's that way. It was about a girl; and he'd curse me to kingdom come in a tea-and-ices sort of tone that made me sick, and I'd answer accordin'. He was a hard case, was Brad. But pretty soon he forgot about the girl, and thought of nothing but what we'd come for.

"The heat was such, and the glare on all them leagues of yellowish grass, I give you my word I scarce knew when we got among the trees. I just looked up, saw it was dark, felt a warm splash on my face, and there we was in the forest. Nothing gradual about that country. One hour that blazin' grass, the next, them everlastin' trees. Grass couldn't have been no grassier, forest couldn't have been no treeier. It's that way. . ."

He looked at a taxi throbbing beside the curb, watched it as it slid away on the smooth asphalt. "Over there we don't overrun things—dead things, I mean, like earth and trees and rivers. . . Or are they so dead? Well, over here it's us that count; over there it's them. Our life's nothin'. And it's not the people either; they may be little better than beasts. But you could plant London, Paris, *and* Noo York among them trees, and it wouldn't make no difference—at least, not to last. Them things are so strong. It's that way.

"We was after ivory, and not green stuff that's been buried for years, waiting for a good bargain, either. Brad he wanted it fresh. He wanted a good village on the edge of the forest where he could get more hunters and porters, and store his ivory, and send it back in lots. He didn't think or pray or want for a thing but ivory.

"We found a village. . . Yes, Raynor's village. There

wasn't no church then, nor no school, and the trees was thicker. Raynor thinned 'em a lot and quite wise. But I see he's took down some of our stockade, which ain't so wise. You see that picture of the reclaimed witch-doctor with the locket round his neck, a hoeing his pumpkin-patch? Well, that feller, he run things, and the young headman was under his thumb. He was too clever for a nigger—he favoured us for his reasons, and we favoured him for ours, and things was very pleasant and comfortable all around.

“Brad and me we'd go off in the grass country for days after the herds. Yes, and we had good luck. You wouldn't get such luck now, not anywheres. A wonderful great country under the moon, and the elephants moving. . . Well, it's that way. And then we'd go back to our clean grass huts huddling on the edge of the trees, and we'd see the little fires at night and hear the girls chatter, and it would seem 'most like home. Then the young chief he'd come in and talk. A bright young feller and we sort o' fascinated him. He got terribly fond of Brad Timmins. Brad he was a big, open-faced, hearty-speakin' sort, and it wasn't till you know'd him well that you'd see how tight his mouth shut and how hard his eyes was. He was always most fair and friendly with the natives, and they thought no end of him. Only that old witch-doctor, squatting in his hut among the rags and chickens—only he saw through Brad. He'd say: 'That white man would burn a whole village for the sake of one tusk,' and it was quite true. But the young headman would say: 'I'm black and he is white, but he is my friend.' And the doctor, blinking his black eyelids with the gray lashes like a monkey's, he'd laugh.

“We sent off three lots of ivory down country. We'd a pile growing, and I—I was getting a bit tired of it. I wanted to take my share and make for the coast, and enjoy myself awhile. Well, it's that way with me. I ain't hard like Brad was. But he was a shark over the ivory. He never got enough. He killed out that country—not for the lust to kill that sometimes takes a man, but because of the money in the ivory, which, I give you my word, is quite a different thing, mister. He was like a miser too. He'd a store of the very finest tusks wrapped up like babies and buried

under the floor of his hut. He just couldn't bear to part with 'em, though he knew they might sp'ile. He just loved 'em. No one knew they was there, but me, and he didn't know I knew. They was his secret hoard, like in a book. I didn't care. I give you my word that I was half-scared o' Brad Timmins them days, he was that mad on the ivory, though always most fair and friendly to them that helped him to it.

"I'm nothing to boast of in the way of softness, mister, as you can guess; but there's things. . . Well, it's that way with me. You'll find a feelin' if you dig far enough, as the dentist said. There's a few things that reach home to me, and that young headman he was one of them when he pulled Brad out from a charging bull. Yes, sir; right out from under. And boosted him up a tree, and nipped up himself, and Brad he shot the bull. It was a fine thing. 'You'll give him a gun for that,' I says to Brad. And Brad, he says; 'You mind your own business. I've no guns to spare.' Then I knew he'd do it cheap, and I was ashamed, and I give the nigger my own third gun, and told him it came from Brad, and not because of the gun, but because he'd saved his life. Yes, it's that way. Queer, ain't it?"

"Well, that country was just about used up; all our ivory was on its way south, and I wanted to follow it. But Brad he would go on. He was set on travelling round the edge of the tree belt till we found fresh elephant country, using the village as a base camp. He had his way, as a man who don't care nothin' for nobody else most generally does. The village howled with grief, all but the old witch-doctor, who made our arrangements for us. At the end of the talk he said something that sounded like 'Mabendy.'

"What's that?" said I.

"He waved his hands toward the forest. 'Very bad people,' he said, 'come and fight, try and take the village. If they take it, they eat us.'

"And a tough morsel you'd be," I thought to myself. And Brad, he laughed. The headman was there, too, and generally when Brad laughed he'd laugh. He didn't now. He said: 'It is very bad. They are as many as the leaves, and their arrows are strong. They came once before and we

beat them off, but they killed many of our fighting men. Now our huts are full of children again, but they are little, and I have just taken my third wife, whom I love. It is very bad.' He laid his hand, which was black as a coal and delicate as a girl's, for a moment on Brad's. 'It is very bad if they come while you, a great warrior, are away. But I will send a messenger, and then you will return and help us.'

"Yes. He said it just like that. Not as a question. He thought Brad was his friend, you see, and spoke accordin'.

"Brad Timmins he looked at me with one big wink, but I looked at my boots. Later I said to him: 'If Mabendy—whoever he or they are—comes, and you're sent for and you don't go, you'll lose your face. You won't get no more hunters and beaters out o' that village.' And he swore at me with pure astonishment as a meddlesome grannie that minded what a pack of niggers thought. Yes, he swore amazin'."

A girl passed, wearing small, high-heeled, patent-leather shoes; the man in khaki watched them gravely until the girl was out of sight. Then he said, suddenly, "But not so bad as when the message come"—and was once more silent.

"Then Mabendy came?"

The man in khaki looked at Hillard, nodding gravely, "Yes, mister. As we heard by special messenger, two days out—a boy with a rag round his head. He come reeling up our line and rolled at Brad's feet, gasping out a word or two. And Brad he began kickin' him cruel.

"'Whatever are you doin'?' I says, pulling Brad back. He was in a breathless rage, and couldn't speak for a minute.

"'Those f-fools,' he stutters, 'those fools! Do they think . . .' His voice ran up to a sort of yell. And then, all of a sudden he stopped, gapin' at me like a fish, and his jaw workin'.

"'What is it *now*?' I says.

"He lets out a sort of whisper—'My tusks—and the next moment, mister, I give you my word, he was beatin' our boys with a gun-butt to turn 'em round quicker.'"

The man leaned down and brushed some dust from his outrageous trousers. "Yes. He'd remembered those tusks, you see—those choice tusks that I wasn't expected to know

of. Yes ; buried under the floor of his hut. He was afraid Mabendy'd find 'em. So we was goin' back."

He was silent again. When he did speak it was unexpected.

"These pants 're his."

"Whose?"

"Brad's. He was a bigger man than me."

"Did he give them to you!"

"No, mister ; I shouldn't say gave. . . Found 'em, I did—aft. Couldn't find anything else ; it'd been all took and distributed. No, not exactly stole ; more for relics, like the Cath'lics."

"Then you got back to the village?"

"Yes, we got back—in a little more than thirty hours—half dead, because of the ivory. . . . There was a little hillock beyond arrow-shot, overlooking the village. We was goin' to spy out a bit from this. We hadn't met no enemy. The sun was settin' behind us, behind the great grass-country—settin' terrible bright, and every leaf and branch on the edge of the forest was sharp and distinct in a great blaze of gold light. Never see such light here, mister. We left our boys on the ground, and Brad and me we crawled up that hillock to have a look. . . .

"The first thing that struck me was the quiet. It was all so quiet. Not till you saw that little black ripple and eddy among the huts would you have guessed that it was men fighting—for their homes and their kids—as you or me might do. It was the absence of firearms that made it seem so quiet.

"I didn't see it all so quick as Brad ; he was ahead of me. When he saw the fight among the huts he gave a cry, kind of as if he was hurt. I guess he was. Then his breath seemed to go from him, and he stood up clear on the top of the mound, his arms out, cursing in whispers—because of the ivory.

That great gold light seemed to beat on him like water. I can't describe it, mister. He seemed to grow bigger, to tower over the huts, to be as huge as one of the trees. To those poor harried folk in the shadow he must have shown, I take it, like a god, a deliverer,—a saviour—there in the light with his arms spread out. Come to save 'em, eh?

"I give you my word for it, the whole fight was held up while you could count twenty, while they stared up at the great gold figure on the hillock. Then—we was out of arrow-range, but some one had an old breech-loader—Brad he went down coughing. When I ran up, 'Damn you,' he groans. 'Don't stop here. Get the tusks out, you fool' . . . Yes, he'd forgot I wasn't supposed to know about them. They was the last thing he thought of, I guess—this side.

"Then . . . ?"

He began again with a start. "Then our men from the village rushed up behind me, mad. And we went down. . .

"I don't remember much else, mister, I never do. Some takes it this way and some that. I got a crack on the head, too, and when I come round a few days after, Brad Timmins he was dead and buried *and* what you might call canonized. Yes, sir.

"Which way? Well, for coming back at the call of his friend in need, I suppose, and losin' his life over it. 'A man of great heart is he who will go into the dark night at the word of his brother,' said the young headman to me; I believe it says much the same thing in the Bible. . . And the old witch-doctor pipes up, 'If he was indeed a man, O child!'

"Mister, I saw the beginning of what you and your kind would call a very curious process—the making of a god. Me, I simply didn't count, though I'd done a lot more than stand on top of a hill in the sunset. Why, I was all blacked up with the back-spit of my old Colt. It's that way. . . . I went to look at Brad's grave, and it was all planted round with holy bushes and a mess of rags and feathers and pots and pumpkins. And while I stood there a woman led her little boy up to the grave and set his little black hand like a monkey's paw on the earth, and said something to Brad. And in two weeks it was rumoured that Brad didn't like folks round there after dark. And in three it was said that as he stood on the hillock he'd gathered the sun's rays in his hands and turned them into the blinded faces of Mabendy. Our village had got off uncommon cheap, and it was all laid down to Brad Timmins. 'Most unreasonable. But it's that way. . . .

"And the stamp of Brad Timmins was on every white man after that. He became the type—what you'd call the symbol, mister. He, in his grave there, smoothed the way for Raynor. Raynor, he was listened to because of Brad Timmins. You may say the church was built by Brad, and the schools laid on him as a foundation stone. And all the time. . . Well, what gets me is, who'll have the credit, eh?"

"And the ivory?"

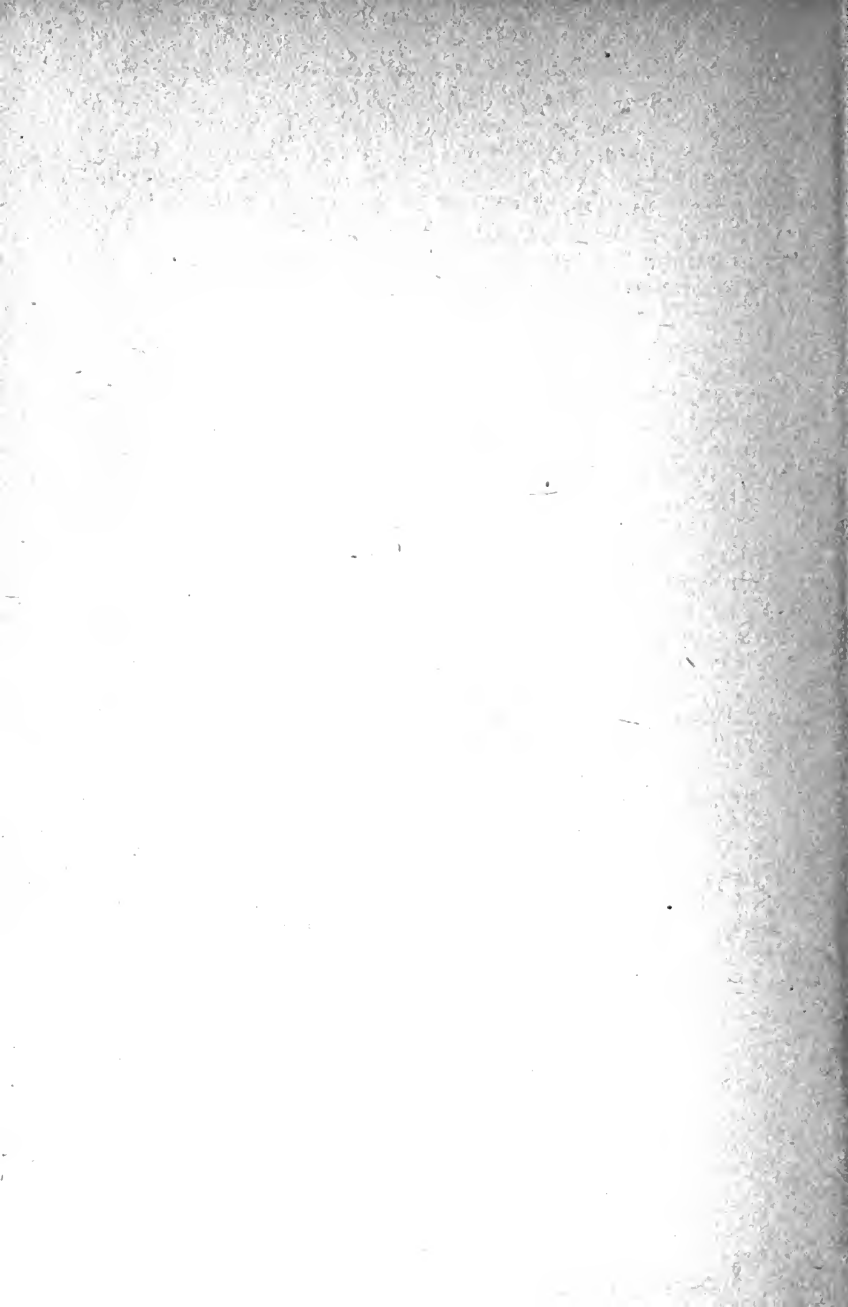
The man in khaki coughed uneasily. "I give you my word, and you may set me down for a fool, I left the ivory where it was. I guess it's there still. They'd have known. . . poor devils in the dark. . . I guess I've kept you an uncommon time, mister."

"Not too long." Hillard drew out a card. "This is my name and address. Will you take it, and—come and tell me some more any time you're inclined?"

"Thank you; I'd be pleased." He got up and shook hands absently, and turned away. But he came back.

"Raynor and his kind they don't know. They can't know. Stands to reason. . . But you saw the picture of that old witch-doctor hoeing his pumpkins that innocent? Yes? And the locket made o' cocoa tins round his neck? Yes? There's the heart of Brad Timmins in them cocoa-tins." He moved off again, pausing only to say, gravely over his shoulder, "And I guess it rattles about inside like a dried bean."

Then he went, and Hillard watched him walking cautiously among the well-dressed crowd, as if he were afraid of tripping over the roots of trees, the blinding spears of the elephant grass.



THE CLOSED DOOR



THE CLOSED DOOR

TONIO brought the news after dinner with the turgid mix he called coffee. "Concepcion says," he remarked, "that there has been a battle beyond Cienaga and all the insurgents have been destroyed." But Concepcion is a liar anyway, and does the señor wish me to open another tin of milk? There is no more fresh. The cow is dead."

Fellowes lifted his head with a jerk from the sticky leather cushion where he had just laid it, too tired even to swear. "Hello! say that again."

"The cow is dead and Pepita wept. There is no doubt that it is dead . . ."

"Never mind. I mean about the battle."

"Saints! Concepcion says there has been one beyond Cienaga, and all the insurgents have been killed."

"Who told him?"

"A man who fought in the battle, señor, a man who was there. Pedro is hiding him in the cafetaria."

"Why?"

"Quien sabe? Pedro says he is frightened. And there is no fresh milk. Little Mother of God, that cow was exhausta . . ."

"Be quiet. Give me my boots again."

For all his tiredness, Fellowes dropped out of the hammock lightly enough. If there really had been a battle, and the insurgentes really had been wiped out, then the victorious troops would probably straggle back to the Town for rest and refreshment. In that case the Company must be warned, and the Company's loose property swept up and secured. "Damn all governments, anyway," said Fellowes, as he struggled with the boots, and wondered where he might lay hand on one of his foremen.

After the heat of the lighted room behind the nettings,

the dusk was almost cool as he plunged into it. A storm was coming, and the sun had dropped early into dark cloud. Sky and forest were so much of a blackness that it looked as if the trees had suddenly and silently surged upward and swallowed the day. The foul little roads were dim and deserted; only the square flared with uncertain light. The church seemed at one moment to waver near the ground; the next, it flickered aloft, striking into the inverted pits of dark like a reflection in a well. Only in front of the café a compact and sweating crowd fought and screamed wholeheartedly, tiny by contrast of the night.

A man whirled from the outskirts of the crowd as Fellowes paused, and caught him by the coat. "There is a man!" he shrieked above the din. "One who has seen the battle!" Fellowes shook him off, lowered his head, and drove through the mob by sheer weight of bone. They took his charge with perfect good-temper. Brown hands caught at him, eyes gleamed and darkened, and half the mouths in the Town screamed at him in unison.

"There is a man in the café. A man who saw the battle! Little Mother of God, a man who was there!"

He was in the hard-breathing front rank, pressed against the wall. The closed door of the café was in front of him. He could see a pale blot wavering like a moth within the glass,—the anxious face of Pedro. Then a darkness appeared in the blot, and two smaller blots appeared with cautious gestures. Fellowes worked forward till he leaned against the door. It opened suddenly. Fat hands dragged him within. And Pedro clapped to the door again in the excited faces of his friends.

"That was well done," said Pedro, puffing heavily. "I saw the señor. I thought, he wishes to question me, to ask me the truth; I will admit him. And you are here, señor."

Fellowes looked round. The thick-walled room was cool and dark, bitter with the smell of stale cheap wine, and as still as a chapel. The noise outside penetrated only as a murmur. "And the man?" he asked, with a breath of relief. "You have him here?"

"The man who was there?" said Pedro. "Yes, señor.

You wish to ask him of the battle? Yes, señor. I will give light."

He brought a little reeking lamp of the sort they light in shrines. Shapes dawned on them cloudily,—barrels, jars, an old door like a cave's mouth, and a flight of steps. "He is . . . ?" began Fellowes in some astonishment. And Pedro finished quickly, "In the cellar? Yes, señor. Why? Because he is afraid."

The last word came back deep and hollow as Pedro led the way into the cellars. "Afraid . . ."

If the upper floor had been as still as a chapel, the cellar was as still as a tomb. The steps led straight down into a square room full of broad mud pillars; on three sides of this room smaller ones opened, bins and cupboards for storing the wine and the aguardiente. Each opening was hung with a rough door, and every door stood open, so that beyond the circling shadows of the pillars there seemed to wait a monstrous company of wings. Fellowes turned mechanically to close the door at the foot of the stairs. And a voice cried to him quickly, "Señor, señor, leave the door open, in the name of God."

"Yes," said the fat Pedro in a whisper, "that is the man. Leave the door open, señor. In the name of God."

Fellowes looked. The soldier sat on a straw mattress with his back against the far wall, so that all the open doors were in view. His slender brown feet were wrapped in strips of native cloth that had once been white, but were now stained a thick dark brown. His knees were drawn up and his hands clasped them. He wore some sort of uniform-coat with gaudy yellow flannel facings, and a broad hat lay beside him, together with an untouched bottle of Pedro's wine. His voice, singularly sharp and quick, was yet the voice of a sound man.

"Are you . . ." began Fellowes, and then stopped. The face touched with a strange reflection not of light, but of darkness, answered him. It was the only answer he had. For the soldier was counting the doors on his fingers,—
"Four—seven—nine, and all open."

Fellowes turned to Pedro. "Is this man—is he a little mad?"

"O no, señor. He is only afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of a closed door, señor. He is not mad. He was there, beyond Cienaga. Wait. I will speak for you."

He leaned forward and spoke loudly, a fat hand on either knee. "This caballero wishes to ask if you were in the fight beyond Cienaga."

The echoes of the deep voice rolled in little thunders; each echo died before the man answered in his sharp, breathless voice.

"Yes, I was there."

"He wishes to hear about the battle. Will you tell him all you know?"

Another silence. Then,— "Yes, I will tell him all I know. But do not shut the doors."

Fellowes took it up eagerly in his best Spanish. "Tell me all you know, my friend, and I'll make it well worth your while." He felt in his pocket for a pencil and a scrap of paper. "Go on. I'm ready."

"There was a river," said the soldier quickly, "and a house with a yellow roof in a clearing."

"Yes. Go on, please."

"A house with a yellow roof. I was in the house."

"Yes, but before that?"

"Before that, the swamps, señor. Then the river, and the village, and the house with the yellow roof. I was in the house."

"But—this is no use." Fellowes turned to Pedro. "I want facts, all he knows—"

Pedro's full-moon face was turned gravely on the soldier; his eyes, gentle as a girl's, watched him only. "Señor," he said, with an air slightly absent, "I think he will tell you all he knows. Listen. In the name of God."

Pedro's voice, the little shrine-lamp sending up a thin black finger to the roof, the shadows, the open doors,—all these chilled Fellowes a little. He glanced curiously from Pedro to the soldier. "Let him tell it in his own way, then."

The soldier began again, as if he were speaking for the first time.

"There was the house with the yellow roof. But before that we crossed the swamps. It's very bad in the swamps. We walked one behind the other on logs laid down in the mud; they were very old logs, very slippery. We walked for a long time, I don't know how long. One man took the quick fever, and when the pain came, he cried and fell into the mud, in a deep place. He was gone before one could cry on the saints, and his gun too, which was a pity. This man was the first who died. I forget his name now, but he was very lucky at cockfighting.

"It was very dark in the swamps, too, dark almost like night. Sometimes the trees broke, and a line of light lay across the mud. As the long trail of men crawled along the logs, each as he passed under the light would go very slowly, and lift his face to it, until he was pushed on by the man behind who wanted to feel the sun on his eyes too. In this way two more men were drowned in the mud. But I was safe, and so was the man in front of me. I was glad of that, because he was my friend."

"But can't you remember how long you were in the swamps?" asked Fellowes, gently. "Who your captain was? Anything that happened?"

The soldier looked troubled. "No, I don't remember. But I had a gun, and cartridges, and a bayoneta; and I was afraid of the insurgentes. I was afraid they would come up behind us. We didn't know where they were. The man in front of me didn't care. He was a young man and merry, with no hatred in him. He said, 'If a Señor Insurgente gave me a good dinner, I'd build him a shrine.' But I was afraid of the insurgentes. They were devils.

"When we came out of the swamps many of us had fever, and our feet were sore with leech-bites. There was a road, but it was very bad. Soon one part of our army was far ahead of the other. Those who went in front had shoes, those who went slowly, hadn't any. I was afraid the insurgentes would catch us, but I couldn't go fast. My friend had shoes, but he stayed with me. And one day he went off by himself, and came back laughing with a pair for me. 'There's a village yonder,' he told me, 'all shut up except the church. A poor place. Only the fleas are

fat. I said a prayer in the church, amigo, and stole the jefe's shoes for you.'

"Now that we both had shoes we left the rearguard behind us, the men who had none. I don't remember where we went. We went on for a long time, and there was fighting in front of us. I think we fought too, because I remember hiding in some thick bushes covered with pink flowers. There was a dead man near us, and when I fired my gun, the pink flowers fell until he was almost buried,—only his feet out. There were lots of dead men, though, we didn't mind them. But there were a few who were not dead. Those insurgentes are devils. I was not afraid of fighting—I was afraid of insurgentes. I would call to my friend in daylight, like a child at night. 'Are they here, have they come, amigo?' And he would say 'No, we must still keep the dinner hot for them.' He was a merry man even when he was hungry.

"I still had my gun, and some cartridges and my bayoneta ; but we had no food. When we came to the river, and the village, and the house with the yellow roof, my friend went away to find food. I hid in the house with the yellow roof, waiting for him ; I hid in a corner of the lower room behind the door, where there was a little window, high up. I had my gun, and my cartridges, and my bayoneta. I was going to fire on the rebels through the window if they came. But they didn't come.

"It was very still in that house. The room was a very nice one, very clean. A water-pot hung under the eaves and dripped, and that was often the only sound I could hear. A child's shoe lay in the middle of the floor ; they must have been well-to-do folk if even the children had shoes. But I couldn't find anything to eat, not so much as a mouldy plantain or a bit of bread. The door was open. I left it open and stood in the shadow behind it with my gun and my cartridges and my bayoneta, looking out of the little window and wondering where my friend was. There was a clearing outside, surrounded with tall trees. Sunlight hung like ropes made from gold between the trees. Birds talked ; one flew in at the open door of the room where I hid. It was so quiet you would never have thought of

fighting, of anger, of dead men. Except when the sunny wind blew off the woods."

As if the remembered quietness locked his lips, the soldier was silent. The door at the foot of the stairs swung in a draught and he watched it anxiously with drawn-in lips until it was still. Then he went on breathlessly: "I will tell the gentleman all I can remember. It is not much. But there was fighting, but I don't remember where or what it was all about. It is all gone. Only I was in the lower room of the house with the yellow roof, behind the door. And the door was open. I was waiting for my friend. I waited a long time, but he came at last.

"He broke through the trees on the far side of the clearing, running as if he were mad, and leaping from side to side. He had a dead fowl under each arm, and as he ran, their long necks jerked together. His tunic was all stuffed out with things, and his ragged trousers fluttered round his legs like flags round a flag-pole at a fiesta. He looked very funny. He was laughing as he ran. I laughed too, and I was just going to run and meet him, when I thought, is there a kettle here to cook the fowl in? I looked for the kettle, and looked back through the window. And I saw the little blue puff break from the trees . . .

"The crack followed, little and foolish in that big quietness as the crack of a twig. And three men ran out of the trees after my friend. They were insurgentes. I had never seen them so close before. I was afraid. But he wasn't, I saw his white teeth flashing as he ran for the open door. He ran as fast as a dog, with the fowls' heads jerking against his knees. And he laughed.

"I became very cold, there behind the door. Something jerked in my chest, and the gun jerked in my hand. I wondered what I should do. If I fired, I might have hit my friend. I didn't fire. I watched the insurgentes coming nearer. I saw their faces, as they ran through the streaks of light and shadow in the clearing, now bright, now dark, and all with one thought in them . . . Then I was afraid. Afraid as I hadn't been before. The light went out, my flesh trembled, my sinews shook against my bones. Mother of God, I died,—died many times."

The soldier bent forward, panting. His eyes for the first time met Fellowes'.

"I was there. I will tell you all I know, señor. He was my friend. I was afraid.

"I shut the door."

The cellar was very still. The lamp-fire trembled, and Pedro's immense squat shadow surged like a cloud.

"I shut the door. The square of sunlight on the floor grew thin and went out. There was a place for a bolt, but no bolt. I drove in my bayoneta,—drove it in with the child's shoe I picked up from the floor. I leaned against the door, staring at the floor where the sunlight had been. My hands were over my ears, but I could hear everything, rolling like stones in my heart, in my head . . .

"I shut the door. It was fast when he flung himself against it, calling me to open in the name of God. I wanted to open it, then, señor, I wanted to open it. But I couldn't move. I was afraid. And they killed him against it. They didn't shoot. They killed him with their bayonets. The points came through to the other side and pricked me,—twice,—as I leaned against it. Then they took the fowls and went away. I don't know how many there were or why they went away. Perhaps they didn't see the door had been open.

"It was very quiet again. I crushed my ear against my side of the door, but there was no sound from *his* side. I put my lips to the wood and spoke to him in a whisper for fear the insurgentes should hear and come back. I couldn't believe that *he* didn't hear. I thought he was listening in silence and laughing,—just to pay me out—but there was no sound but the drip from the water-jar. It was very loud, like a bell. A drop would flash in the shadow and fall, and then the sound would come in my head,—'Boom.' Soon I saw that there were two 'Booms' to every drip that fell. I couldn't understand it at first. But the other drip, the other noise, were outside. I looked down at my feet. The jefe's shoes he had stolen for me were very dark, very wet, with—with what had dripped and run under the closed door from his side to mine . . .

"I was afraid again. I kicked off the shoes and ran round

and round the room. I couldn't believe that he was dead. He was such a merry one. As I ran, I kept saying, 'I'm afraid of the insurgentes, afraid of the insurgentes,' and I called, 'Are you here, amigo, have they come?' But he **didn't** answer 'We must keep the soup hot.' Then I knew I wasn't afraid of the insurgentes, but of my amigo on the other side of the door.

"When it was dark, so dark I could see nothing, I went to the door. My hands were quite steady as I worked out the bayoneta. But I opened it the breadth of a hand. Señor, the door opened inwards. As it came, something came with it, heavy, dragging on the ground—pinned to it as a bat's skin's pinned on a board . . .

"I don't remember much. I shut the door again. I was very cold. I took my gun and broke down the window and climbed out that way.

"The clearing was in very dark shadow, but the tops of the trees were white in the coming moonlight. I knew I must be away before the moonlight shone on the door. I dropped from the window and my foot struck something,—a loaf of bread. His tunic was all fat with things as he ran and laughed . . .

"I was very hungry. I caught it up and ran, wondering why the insurgentes had left it. I went on and on. The moon rose and the light came on my hands. They were dark, señor, the bread was dark. No wonder the insurgentes had left it. It was all spoiled . . .

"I don't remember much more. I went on,—went on. Then it was day, and there was a town, one of our towns. When they saw my feet, they let me ride in the wagons. They offered me bread, but I couldn't eat it. They thought I was wounded and starved. They thought I had fought the rebels. Perhaps I had. But I only remember that I was afraid. And so I shut the door."

"But the fighting?" asked Fellowes under his breath. "Under whose command? Who cut off the insurgentes? Where will the troops retire? He must . . ."

"Hush, señor." Pedro lifted his hand and turned on his heel. "Hush. He knows no more."

"More?" The man in the yellow facings caught at the

word. "Tell the gentleman that's all. There was a house, and an open door, and I shut the door."

"Come," said Pedro again. "there is no more. He has told you all he knows."

They went softly up the steps. And behind them the breathless voice called: "Señor, señor, for the pity of God, do not close the door!"

THE MEN WHO CLIMBED



THE MEN WHO CLIMBED

WHAT had taken Stephen Forrester to the Exhibition would be difficult to say. He had told his friends that snow and ice and anything higher than a first floor made him feel ill, and had then proceeded to lose himself very pleasantly among the fleshpots. Well, he had earned his fleshpots. Yet here he was, at three o'clock on a sunny afternoon, paying his entrance fee like anybody else to the Association Rooms, to see Macrae's photographs.

"The large photographs of Mount Forrester are in Room C," said the very efficient young person with the bobbed hair who gave him his change. "Kindly keep to the right." He thanked her humbly and clicked through the turnstile in the wake of a large woman in musquash and carnations, who would probably have given much to know him. For Forrester was something of a lion that winter.

He went into Room C, after a guilty glance about A and B. But no one was there who knew him. No one said: "That's Forrester! Yes, the fellow with the limp. You'd never dream he was fond of that sort of thing, would you?" His first thought was: "Mac did some good work!" Then, with an involuntarily catching of the breath, he stopped short before the great photograph that held the end wall alone.

And as he did so he knew with sure foreknowledge that any time in his life he might be brought up with that little thrill, that while he lived, a hundred chance scents or colours or silences would have power to renew for him that air of ineffable space, those sheathed and virgin rocks, those upper snows austere against the burning blue; that the impersonal passion of the climber had been, was, and forever would be the moving force of his soul.

"Mount Forrester from the South-east," the catalogue

had it. Just that! He was the man who had conquered Mount Forrester; and he was the man who knew how utterly the great height had conquered him.

He sat down on one of the leather divans placed at intervals down the centre of the room, staring at the enlarged photograph with half-closed eyes. The heated air grew cold in his throat; inside his irreproachable gloves the scars of his old frost-bites burned and tingled; he tapped one well-shod foot—the lame one—on the floor. There in the extreme left-hand corner of the picture was the bit of ice that had slid and crushed him. That had been on the return journey. They said he'd never walk again. Macrae himself had been all in when he took that picture. Why, they'd put him in the tent in the middle of a snow flurry; the cloud had cleared and the light was right; they'd found Mac up to his ears in snow half a mile away, clutching the camera—raving, but he'd taken the picture.

"Excuse me, boss—you done any climbin'?"

Forrester came to earth with a start, and leaned round the curve of the leather seat-back the better to see and answer the man who had so suddenly spoken to him. But he was slow in answering as the details of the questioner's face presented themselves to him around the curve of the fat green morocco. For what possible interest could such a one have in climbing mountains? An elderly clerk out of work? Scarcely educated enough, judged Forrester. A night watchman? More likely. Anyway, a sub-under-assistant at whatever he set his hand to do. The stamp of the man born to work under other men was on him, on his respectable garments, on his vague face set in graying bristles; one could guess him treading forever the same smoothed rut, running on the same rail, until pushed off at last into a still deeper obscurity. And he was already growing old. Forrester, clean from his heights, was quick to pity. "One of the Great Unlucky," he said to himself; and aloud: "Yes, I've climbed a good bit. Are you—interested in it?"

The stranger smiled slowly. Then he drew out seven coppers and arranged them along his dingy palm. There was a certain youthfulness, a hovering and unexpected

sweetness in his smile that attracted Forrester. "These here," he said, "are all I got left o' what Maggie allows me fer baccy this week, after payin' me admission." He returned the coins to his pocket and resumed his slow contemplation of the picture.

For a moment Forrester was in doubt. But the shabby-respectable man was oblivious of him, his whole attention absorbed in the picture. And it was Forrester who renewed the conversation on some impulse of sympathy, saying: "Where have you done your climbing?"

"Me? Oh, anywhere north o' Thunder Valley, for the most part. You *got* to climb there to get about. Don't see no sense in doin' it fer fun." He turned his eyes again to the photograph, and once more that shy, half-boyish smile transfigured his commonplace face. "But you thinks different when yer young eh, Mister? Where you done *your* climbin' if I may arsk?"

Forrester nodded toward the wall. "Thereabouts mostly," he said pleasantly. "My name's Forrester—Stephen Forrester, at your service."

The stranger turned completely around; his face rose over the back of the divan like a queer mild moon. "You—Forrester?" he said with interest. "Well, now! You the feller that climbed that mountain an' had it named fer him?"

"Yes," smiled Forrester, conscious of an excusable glow.

"My! said the unknown softly. "My! If that don't beat all!" He looked at Forrester carefully, as if making a friendly inventory of him. He rubbed his hands gently together. "Maggie 'll be *that* amused to hear tell I seen you!" he said shyly.

Well—*amused* was not just the word that Forrester had expected! But the other man came sidling along the leather seat, all alight with interest. He put out his hand, so palpably the hand of a failure, and touched Forrester's sleeve. "Mister," he begged simply, "tell me all about it, so's I can tell Maggie!"

The appeal hit Forrester in his softest place. He was touched. Who was Maggie? He visioned her as beautiful and dreaming of her native hills; in a mental flash he saw himself telling a moving story to a dozen well-appointed

dinner-tables. He said kindly: "Tell me what you want to know. But first—who's Maggie? Where is she?"

"My old girl, Mister. She's washin' dishes at Henniker's till I get a job." He went on with a touch of pride: "She don't have to work when *I'm* doin' anything, boss."

Again Forrester was moved; he guessed that Maggie washed dishes a lot at Henniker's and did it cheerily. Maggie's husband went on with a shy eagerness, jerking his thumb at the wall: "Did you have to cross Somahl' to the glacier, Mister?" "Yes." Forrester was conscious of an increasing astonishment, for the glacier was not shown on the photograph, and is not named on any map. "We climbed that long ridge to the east—the photograph does not show much of it—and worked along till we came to the little plateau. And there we made our last camp. We went up next day. We wanted to do it in a day, so as not to spend a night at that altitude."

"I know." The face of Maggie's husband showed keener, harder; he was touched with some quiet amusement that puzzled Forrester. "You went up roped, boss?"

"As far as that big fissure." Forrester was kindling, as a lyric poet might kindle at the talk of love. "We cast them off then. They were too great a weight. We kept them as dry as we could, but there was a continual *poudre* and they were frozen as stiff as steel rods, crackling as we moved. It sounded so loud, that crackle."

"The papers say you was the only one that made the peak, Mister, the only one that made good."

"It wasn't the other fellows' fault," said Forrester quickly. "They were fine stuff—white men. I tell you they gave up their chances so I should have mine. Yes. They helped me all through, spent their strength for me—so that in the end they'd none left, and I went on alone—on their strength. A man said to me last week: 'You hired them, didn't you?' 'What difference does that make?' I said, 'when they gave me what money couldn't buy?'"

Forrester's eyes went to the picture; he was abruptly silent. Then: "They gave me *that*," he breathed.

After a minute he went on quietly, talking more to himself than to the man beside him:

"I left Mason and Pieters on the last tiny level with the tent over them. Mason was finished. Pieters could have come with me, but daren't leave Mason, who was in a state of collapse, and blue. Pieters never stopped rubbing him, he told me, for an hour. I went on alone, up a slope of hard old snow, steep, but easy enough—that slope—and in five minutes it was as if I'd been alone for centuries from the beginning of the world! I drew myself up on a ledge and looked down. Mason and Pieters were little black figures beneath. Pieters lifted a hand to me. Then I went on over that hummock—there—and they were gone. It seemed to be all right—all right, I mean, that I should be alone at the end—alone with my mountain.

"The hardest part of the climbing was over. There remained only that great soaring wedge of immortal snow, that heaved above me into the blue. I had only to climb, to keep on working upward as long as my strength held. I knew it would not fail. My arms, outstretched against the face of the steep, and looking as weak as a fly's legs, were yet long enough and strong enough to clasp the whole of that magnificent summit, and leave their mark upon it, and conquer it. What a thing humanity is! Oh, I'm talking nonsense, if you like, but I was a little mad at the time. If you've climbed, you know how it is!"

But Forrester saw at the same moment that his listener didn't know how it was, for all he was smiling indulgently. "I been mad in my time, boss," he said almost with a wink. "I ain't the head for such things now."

Forrester laughed a little. "It took some head," he confessed, nodding at the photograph. "After I worked round that curve there, I had nothing under me but a drop—a drop clear to timber-line. I'd loose a handful of snow from somewhere, and it'd go glittering off into the emptiness behind me like frozen smoke, and I'd stick close for a minute to see if any more was coming. Then I'd watch those bits of snow-dust fall and fall and fall—miles and miles they seemed to fall, right to the black furriness that was the forest of the lower slopes. They came near to shaking me. And now and then I seemed to have nothing at all under hands or feet—to be just afloat in dizzy space. Then I'd look up,

and the whole weight of the summit'd rush back at me—hang over me until I seemed to be underneath it and crushed flat. And then I'd kind of come back to myself, and know what I was doing. And I tell you I wouldn't have swapped places with a millionaire! It's at times like that a man feels his soul alive in him and knows he can't fail, whatever seems to happen. They say that morally we only use about one-tenth of our power of living. It takes the divine moment to teach us what we are when we use ten-tenths—what we are!"

Forrester was frankly smiling now, frankly talking to himself. Maggie's husband was listening in respectful bewilderment, yet with something held in reserve; he sat with his elbows on his knees and his hands dangling forward. Forrester wished he wouldn't; somehow, those hands looked so inept, so apologetic. He went on abruptly:

"I was corkscrewing upwards, if you see what I mean. I calculated to reach the top on the side opposite to where I'd left my two men, for we'd seen that the overhang was less there. But on that side the wind was worse. It was not strong—just a steady swim of cold air fit to freeze the breath inside you.

"I was working up very safely and steadily, finding everything much easier than I had expected, which is often the way. I was cutting steps in solid snow. Nothing could happen to me as long as I kept on cutting steps. I was as safe as a house, for all the next stopping place was two thousand feet under. And I was just thinking so when the thong with which my ice-axe was looped round my wrist caught against a snag that thrust through the snow-crust, and snapped. I shifted my grip on the shaft for greater security; and the next instant the thing was out of my hand and glissading down the slope.

"Well, it was awkward enough, but not fatal. I went on without it, though slower; making detours round hummocks I'd have cut into, and scooping holds with the big knife I had on a lanyard round my neck. I went on so for maybe another hour, not thinking of the top, pinning my mind to every inch of the ascent.

"And then—all in a moment, as it seemed—I looked up.

And there was the summit not two hundred feet above me, and easy all the way.

"Well, I hung on with toes and fingers and tried to cheer, but I couldn't get it out. Change places with a millionaire! I wouldn't have changed places with the kings of the earth! And then I looked more closely at what lay in front of me. And—the cheer went out of me like the flame out of a candle.

"Immediately over me, and for as far round as I could see the mountain-top was girdled with a band of rock, a sheer face, too sheer to hold the snow. It was all veined with ice, pitted and porous with the weather since the world began—soft stuff, crumbling under frost and sun. Yes, there was just about twenty feet of it. After that a smooth mound of snow to the very crest. And I lay with my chin in a drift at the foot of it, and cried like a baby. For I knew that no power on earth could get me up that little twenty-foot wall of rock without an axe to chip holds with.

"I worked up to it and stood against it. There was a ledge that held me comfortably. I stood on it and drove in the knife as far as I could reach above my head, tossed my line round it and pulled. It came away in a tinkle of tiny ice-chips and rotten rock. I stared below me. I wondered how long it would take me to get down—without having reached the top. I looked to my right, just to make certain of what I was deadly sure of already—that there wasn't any possible way up for a single climber farther along the ledge. And there, as sure as I'm a living man, were little steps cut roughly in the rock—choked with ice, but recognizable, serviceable.

"When I told our president that," said Forrester after a silence, "he told *me* I'd gone light-headed from exposure."

Forrester gazed at the picture a moment, a smile on his fine vivid face. His eyes looked into a great distance; and the eyes of the man beside him rested on him—kindly, uncomprehendingly, a little wistfully, as if he were trying to follow Forrester into that shining distance.

"I knew." Forrester was speaking to his own soul. "Oh, I knew," he repeated, softly. "I met him there. I felt him there—my nameless forerunner! There was a high spirit near me in the very wind. I touched hands with an

unknown comrade, a friend who'd climbed higher, leaving his glory to me like a coat for which he'd no more use. How high he must have climbed! To the very stars!

"The steps were very much weathered. They looked very old. They were filled, as I said, with old ice, which I chipped out with the hook of my knife. I went up hand over hand.

"The rest was easy. I won't trouble you with it. I stood on the summit at last, and left the tiny flag there that I'd carried up. He—my forerunner—seemed to be waiting for me there; I fancied that he gave me a generous smile. I knew he didn't grudge me anything. It sounds rubbish *here*, eh? but *there* I smiled back at him—the man in whose steps I'd climbed to the best thing life's given me yet; and I drank his health in the last of my brandy. Then I—came down."

The pleasant, vigorous voice died to silence. Both men, so contrasted, sat silent for a while, looking at the picture, which even in the electric light seemed to glow and recede into some splendid atmosphere of its own.

At last Forrester turned, a little shamefaced; he felt that in talking so to a man who couldn't possibly understand, he'd gone very near to making a fool of himself and his mountain. There was honest pity in his heart for any man who knew nothing of such austere triumphs as he enjoyed; perhaps there was a shade of contempt, too, as he said hastily: "See here, I've made you listen to a lot of stuff, eh? But you must let me pay for this, you know. Just the price of admission—between two men who have something in common."

He broke off. For he was not heard. The shabby man was gazing at the photograph. And as he gazed he chuckled quietly and rubbed his faded knees. "If you'd looked, Mister," he said, "if you'd looked, maybe you'd have found the bits of an ol' lantern, up there where you left the flag!"

Perfectly motionless, Forrester waited.

The shabby man turned to him genially. "Such fools as we are when we're young!" he said. "How it all comes back!" He smiled upon the younger man again with that bright, gentle look which gave him momentarily the aspect

of youth ; it was like a light reflected from some mountain-peak of the soul. He went on : " Maggie'll be *that* interested when she hears some one has set right alongside me, talkin'—excuse me, boss—like man to man, some one that's been up that there mountain ! "

Still Forrester waited, dry-mouthed.

" You see, Mister, me and Maggie, we always counted that there old mountain as ours like, seein' as I was the only feller'd ever been up it in them days. And a fine fool I was. Many's the time Maggie's said to me : ' I wonder I took you, Si,' she's said, ' seein' you showed me what kind of a fool you was when you was courtin'.' Maggie's a great one for a joke. ' Or maybe,' she says, ' I took you just because you was such a fool that Christmas. There's no accountin' for a woman's taste,' she says."

That reflection of a far light rosed his colourless face as he turned again to Forrester ; it lighted a pleasant blue star in his homely eyes ; he laughed consciously, and glanced down at his patched shoes.

" We wasn't married then," he explained confidentially. " It's a long time ago. Seems queer that there ever *was* a time when Maggie and me wasn't married ; but there was." He wrinkled his brow with a ruminative air. " But there wasn't never at no time, any other girl than Maggie Delane for me." He looked gently at Forrester. " You should 'a' seen her then," he said ; " she was the purtiest girl in Cascapedia, my Maggie was.

" There was a lot of fellers after her. She could 'a' done lots better, but—she stuck to me. Seems like I didn't have much luck, even then. I dunno why—I was always willin' to work. It just happened that way, Mister. Times I said to her : ' You'd best quit me, honey, and take up with a luckier man.' I said that not knowin' just what I'd do if she done it. But she—she just put her hands on my shoulders,"—he glanced wonderingly at his shabby coat,—“ she put her hands there, an' she says : ' Good luck or bad, I'll never go back on you, Si.' ” His slow eyes went back to Forrester's face. " You know how it is with them, with the good ones, boss, when they're—fond of a feller."

" No," said Forrester, after a short silence, and very

humbly, "no, I don't know—yet. Go on, please. Tell me the rest."

"We was to have been married that Christmas. But I didn't have no luck. I didn't have enough saved. It near broke my heart. I hadn't got so kinder used to waitin' on things then, and I was just set on goin' to Cascapedia and claimin' my girl that Christmas. She was workin' in a store there, and I was on a lumberin' job back on the Oucouagan. 'Twasn't so far asunders, but the hills riz up to heaven in betwixt us. I hadn't seen her in a long while, Mister. And when the time come on, an' I'd no luck an' had been sick, an' dassent to quit my job, I tramped them hills all one night, boss, tryin' to find the nerve to write Maggie and say: 'We can't be married this Christmas after all, honey; we'll have to wait for the spring.'"

He bent down and picked a thread carefully from his frayed trousers. Raising his head, he stared again at the picture. "I wrote it at last," he went on in his heavy way, "an' I sent it to her. I was down an' out. I—kinder lost me self-respeck, boss, havin' to write that way to Maggie when she could 'a' done so much better. . . . Yes sir. An' then her answer came. She wasn't a very good writer. She just said I wasn't to worry; she guessed she could get along without me till the spring—always one for a joke, was Maggie!—but I was to think of her on Christmas."

The shabby man's voice trailed off into silence. After a moment he said, thoughtfully: "Queer how they—the good ones—can break a feller all up an' put him on his feet at the same time, aint it, boss?"

"I—don't know," said Forrester, softly. "Go on please."

"She said I was to think of her on Christmas. Somethin' you said awhile back put me in mind of how I felt then. Think of her! Why, I—I felt as though I could chop the mountains down same as if they was trees to get her! I felt there was nothin'—just nothin'—I couldn't do, or bear, or get, so as Maggie didn't quit me. I felt I'd get her them great shiny stars fer buttons to her Sunday dress if she was wantin' them. Made me feel twelve foot high and drunk, she did, just with three lines o' bad spellin' and a joke! I'd five dollars in me pocket, an' I went an' looked up a

Siwash, one o' them mountain Injuns that looks like a Chinaman and moves up or down like a goat ; I'd done him a kindness a little while back, an' he was grateful, which is more'n white fellers always is. I said, would he take a letter to my *klootch* in Cascapedia, for five dollars, she to get it on Christmas ? Yes, he said, he would. I gave him the letter an' the bill, an' off he went—not that she was rightly my *klootch* then, o' course, an' she'd 'a' been terrible vexed if she'd known I called her so ; but it was near enough fer *him*.

" We wasn't so far apart, as I says—not so many miles on the level, only not a yard of it *was* level ; the hills was like a wall between us ; but there was one thing we could both see, one thing that was in sight from Cascapedia an' from the Oucouagan on the other side. An' that was that mountain there."

He looked at the picture with lingering surprise " My ! " he said, " You wouldn't never think I'd been up there, would you ? You'd think I was too old and had too much sense. But I was young then ; and some way Maggie'd made me clean crazy."

He flushed and gave Forrester a shy, friendly smile. " Two nights," he said, laughing a little, " two nights I sat up, fixin' a lantern to suit me—fixin' it so's no draft could get in, puttin' in extry wicks an' more oil an' the dear knows what-all ! I'd said to Maggie in my letter I'd sent, ' You borror a pair of glasses if it ain't clear,' I says, ' an' you look at the top o' the biggest mountain you see in betwixt us,' I says ' on Christmas night, an' you'll see if I'm thinkin' of you or not, Maggie Delane.' That's what I says."

" When the lantern was fixed, I packed it on me back keerful, an' I borrerred an ice-ax, an' a pair o' creepers, an' I climbed that there mountain an' left the lighted lantern on the top."

Forrester stared at him. Did he know what he was saying, what, in that brief day of glory given him by a girl's trust, he had done ? No, he had no inkling of it ; no shadow of a suspicion crossed his simple mind that he had achieved a feat that no man had been able to repeat for thirty years. He was smiling pleasantly, indulgently, at the folly of

his youth. And Forrester said, not knowing he spoke aloud: "It's better it should be like that. It's more beautiful so."

"Did you speak, Mister?"

"No—nothing. Please go on."

But the charm was broken; the reflection of that far light was fading from the ageing face as Forrester had seen the reflected glory of his peak fading from the lowlands. The shabby man's shyness was increasing; he looked at Forrester uneasily. "I dunno what made me talk so much," he mumbled apologetically. "Seein' that picture an' all, I guess. I aint' generally one to talk much."

"Good heavens, man," cried Forrester, "don't you know you've just been telling me the most beautiful thing I ever heard?" He checked himself abruptly at the look in his companion's face. "Tell me how you got up," he went on more quietly.

But the present had again usurped the splendid past. "I don't rightly remember now," said the shabby man uncertainly. "My mind was that full of Maggie, anyways. . . . I crossed the glacier below where you did, an' then I—I guess, I just went up, boss."

"Yes," agreed Forrester, "you just went up. . . . And the lantern wasn't hurt, and Maggie saw the light from Cascapedia?"

"She saw it boss. It burned till the oil give out. 'Twasn't hurt a mite."

Forrester looked again at the photograph. He visioned his great peak, a shadow against the winter stars, crowned with a tiniest point of light—a weak star that invaded those awful solitudes, those dominions of wind and cloud, dawn and darkness, to tell a girl in a store that her man hadn't forgotten her! He roused from his vision to see Maggie's husband on his feet, to hear him mumbling good-bye.

" . . . be terribly amused to hear I seen you," he heard. "Take it as a favour, boss, if you'd not mention it to no one . . . do a steady man no good. They'd think I was drunk."

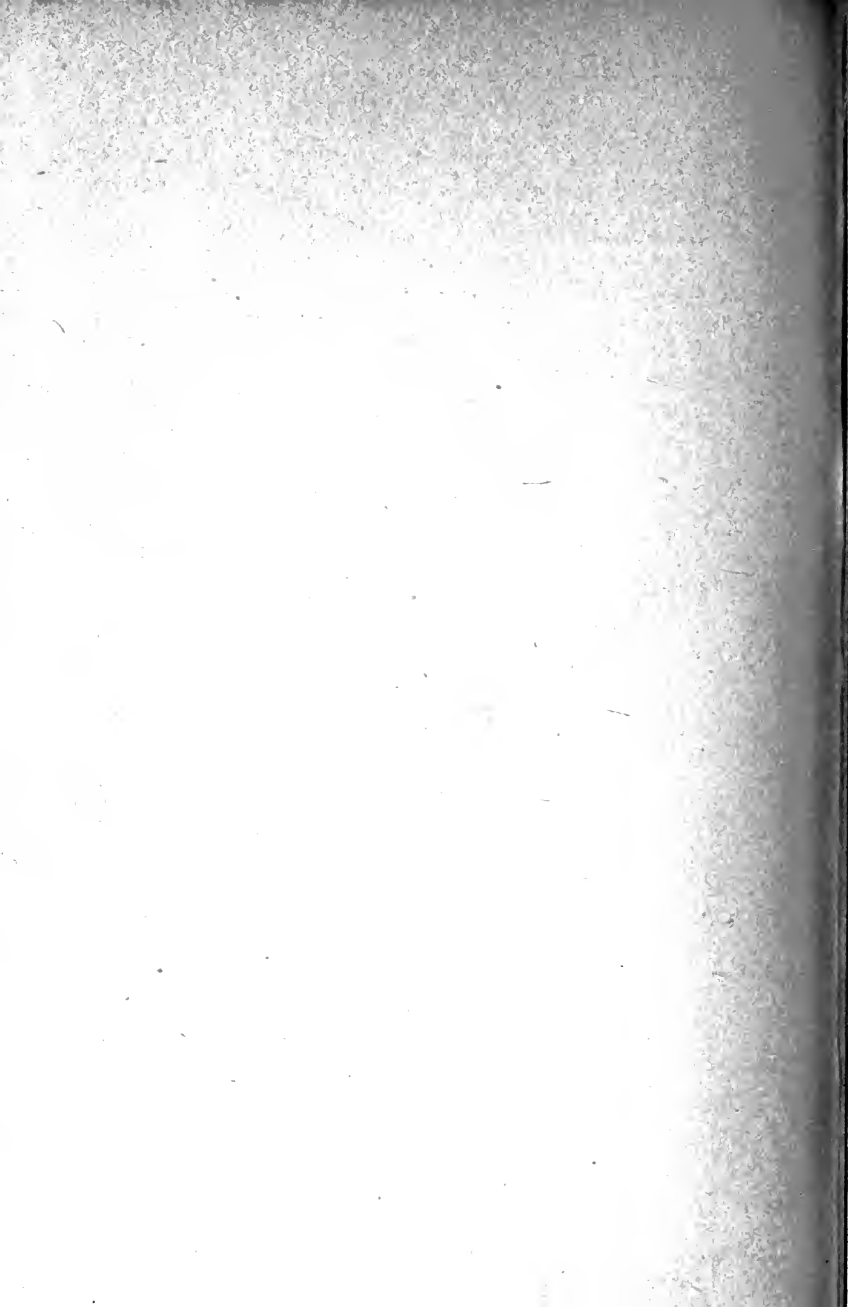
Forrester got up and shook hands, which seemed to abash the man very much.

"It's better that way too," he said abruptly, "though

you won't have the least idea what I mean. If I can ever have the honour of doing anything for you or Maggie, let me know."

The shabby man was gone. An official in blue and silver buttons was staring suspiciously at Forrester. He scowled at the official, and went and stood in front of the great photograph. He stood there so long that the official gave up watching him and moved away. The room was empty. Forrester glanced around; then he took out his fountain pen.

He looked again at the picture of the peak. "Not mine," he said under his breath, and humbly, "not mine!" There was a large ticket attached to the frame, bearing the legend: "Mount Forrester from the South-east." He crossed out the word "Forrester," and above the erasure, in neat black letters, he wrote the words: "Maggie Delane." Then he too, went away.



THE WORKER IN SANDAL-WOOD



THE WORKER IN SANDAL-WOOD

I LIKE to think of this as a true story, but you who read may please yourselves, siding either with the curé, who says Hyacinthe dreamed it all, and did the carving himself in his sleep, or with Madame. I am sure that Hyacinthe thinks it true, and so does Madame, but then she has the cabinet, with the little birds and the lilies carved at the corners. Monsieur le curé shrugs his patient shoulders ; but then he is tainted with the infidelities of cities, good man, having been three times to Montreal, and once, in an electric car, to Sainte Anne. He and Madame still talk it over whenever they meet, though it happened so many years ago, and each leaves the other forever unconvinced. Meanwhile the dust gathers in the infinite fine lines of the little birds' feathers, and softens the lily stamens where Madame's duster may not go ; and the wood, ageing, takes on a golden gleam as of immemorial sunsets : that pale red wood, heavy with the scent of the ancient East ; the wood that Hyacinthe loved.

It was the only wood of that kind which had ever been seen in Terminaison. Pierre L'Oreillard brought it into the workshop one morning ; a small heavy bundle wrapped in sacking, and then in burlap, and then in fine soft cloths. He laid it on a pile of shavings, and unwrapped it carefully and a dim sweetness filled the dark shed and hung heavily in the thin winter sunbeams.

Pierre L'Oreillard rubbed the wood respectfully with his knobby fingers. "It is sandal-wood," he explained to Hyacinthe, pride of knowledge making him expansive ; "a most precious wood that grows in warm countries, thou great goblin. Smell it, *imbécile*. It is sweeter than cedar. It is to make a cabinet for the old Madame at the big house.

Thy great hands shall smooth the wood, *nigaud*, and I,—I, Pierre the cabinet-maker, shall render it beautiful." Then he went out, locking the door behind him.

When he was gone Hyacinthe laid down his plane, blew on his stiff fingers, and shambled slowly over to the wood. He was a great clumsy boy of fourteen, dark-faced, very slow of speech, dull-eyed and uncared for. He was clumsy because it is impossible to move gracefully when you are growing very big and fast on quite insufficient food. He was dull-eyed because all eyes met his unlovingly; uncared for, because none knew the beauty of his soul. But his heavy young hands could carve simple things, like flowers and birds and beasts, to perfection, as the curé pointed out. Simon has a tobacco-jar, carved with pine-cones and squirrels, and the curé has a pipe whose bowl is the bloom of a moccasin-flower, that I have seen. But it is all very long ago. And facts, in those lonely villages, easily become transfigured, touched upon their gray with a golden gleam.

"Thy hands shall smooth the wood, *nigaud*, and I shall render it beautiful," said Pierre L'Oreillard, and went off to drink brandy at the Cinq Châteaux.

Hyacinthe knew that the making of the cabinet would fall to him, as most of the other work did. He also touched the strange sweet wood, and at last laid his cheek against it, while the fragrance caught his breath. "How it is beautiful," said Hyacinthe, and for a moment his eyes glowed and he was happy. Then the light passed, and with bent head he shuffled back to his bench through a foam of white shavings curling almost to his knees.

"Madame perhaps will want the cabinet next week, for that is Christmas," said Hyacinthe, and fell to work harder than ever, though it was so cold in the shed that his breath hung like a little silver cloud and the steel stung his hands. There was a tiny window to his right, through which, when it was clear of frost, one looked on Terminaison, and that was cheerful and made one whistle. But to the left, through the chink of the ill-fitting door, there was nothing but the forest and the road dying away in it, and the trees moving heavily under the snow. Yet, from there came all Hyacinthe's dumb dreams and slow reluctant fancies, which

he sometimes found himself able to tell,—in wood, not in words.

Brandy was good at the Cinq Châteaux, and Pierre L'Oreillard gave Hyacinthe plenty of directions, but no further help with the cabinet.

"That is to be finished for Madame on the festival, *gros escargot*!" said he, cuffing Hyacinthe's ears furiously, "finished, and with a prettiness about the corners, hearest thou, *ourson*? I suffer from a delicacy of the constitution and a little feebleness in the legs on these days, so that I cannot handle the tools. I must leave this work to thee, *gâcheur*. See it is done properly, and stand up and touch a hand to thy cap when I address thee, *orvet*, great slow-worm."

"Yes, monsieur" said Hyacinthe, wearily.

It is hard, when you do all the work, to be cuffed into the bargain, and fourteen is not very old. He went to work on the cabinet with slow, exquisite skill, but on the eve of Noel, he was still at work, and the cabinet unfinished. It meant a thrashing from Pierre if the morrow came and found it still unfinished, and Pierre's thrashings were cruel. But it was growing into a thing of perfection under his slow hands, and Hyacinthe would not hurry over it.

"Then work on it all night, and show it to me all completed in the morning, or thy bones shall mourn thine idleness," said Pierre with a flicker of his little eyes. And he shut Hyacinthe into the workshop with a smoky lamp, his tools and the sandal-wood cabinet.

It was nothing unusual. The boy had often been left before to finish a piece of work overnight while Pierre went off to his brandies. But this was Christmas Eve, and he was very tired. The cold crept into the shed until the scent of the sandal-wood could not make him dream himself warm, and the roof cracked sullenly in the frost. There came upon Hyacinthe one of those awful, hopeless despairs that children know. It seemed to be a living presence that caught up his soul and crushed it in black hands. "In all the world, nothing!" said he, staring at the dull flame; "no place, no heart, no love! O kind God, is there a place, a love for me in another world?"

I cannot endure to think of Hyacinthe, poor lad, shut up

despairing in the work-shop with his loneliness, his cold, and his hunger, on the eve of Christmas. He was but an overgrown, unhappy child, and for unhappy children no aid, at this season, seems too divine for faith. So Madame says, and she is very old and very wise. Hyacinthe even looked at the chisel in his hand, and thought that by a touch of that he might lose it all, all, and be at peace, somewhere not far from God; only it was forbidden. Then came the tears, and great sobs that sickened and deafened him, so that he scarcely heard the gentle rattling of the latch.

At least, I suppose it came then, but it may have been later. The story is all so vague here, so confused with fancies that have spoiled the first simplicity. I think that Hyacinthe must have gone to the door, opening it upon the still woods and the frosty stars, and the lad who stood outside in the snow must have said: "I see you are working late, comrade. May I come in?" or something like it.

Hyacinthe brushed his ragged sleeve across his eyes, and opened the door wider with a little nod to the other to enter. Those little lonely villages strung along the great river see strange wayfarers adrift inland from the sea. Hyacinthe said to himself that surely here was such a one.

Afterwards he told the curé that for a moment he had been bewildered. Dully blinking into the stranger's eyes, he lost for a flash the first impression of youth and received one of some incredible age or sadness. But this also passed and he knew that the wanderer's eyes were only quiet, very quiet, like the little pools in the wood where the wild does went to drink. As he turned within the door, smiling at Hyacinthe and shaking some snow from his fur cap, he did not seem more than sixteen or so.

"It is very cold outside," he said. "There is a big oak tree on the edge of the fields that has split in the frost and frightened all the little squirrels asleep there. Next year it will make an even better home for them. And see what I found close by!" He opened his fingers, and showed Hyacinthe a little sparrow lying unruffled in the palm.

"*Pauvrette!*" said the dull Hyacinthe.

"*Pauvrette!* Is it then dead?" He touched it with a gentle forefinger.

"No," answered the strange boy, "it is not dead. We'll put it here among the shavings, not far from the lamp, and it will be well by morning."

He smiled at Hyacinthe again, and the shambling lad felt dimly as if the scent of the sandal-wood had deepened, and the lamp flame burned clearer. But the stranger's eyes were only quiet, quiet.

"Have you come far?" asked Hyacinthe. "It is a bad season for travelling, and the wolves are out in the woods."

"A long way," said the other; "a long, long way. I heard a child cry . . ."

"There is no child here," answered Hyacinthe, shaking his head. "Monsieur L'Oreillard is not fond of children, he says they cost too much money. But if you have come far, you must be cold and hungry, and I have no food nor fire. At the Cinq Châteaux you will find both!"

The stranger looked at him again with those quiet eyes, and Hyacinthe fancied his face was familiar. "I will stay here," he said. "You are very late at work and you are unhappy."

"Why, as to that," answered Hyacinthe, rubbing again at his cheeks and ashamed of his tears, "most of us are sad at one time or another, the good God knows. Stay here and welcome if it pleases you, and you may take a share of my bed, though it is no more than a pile of balsam boughs and an old blanket, in the loft. But I must work at this cabinet, for the drawer must be finished and the handles put on and these corners carved, all by the holy morning; or my wages will be paid with a stick."

"You have a hard master," put in the other boy, "if he would pay you with blows upon the feast of Noel."

"He is hard enough," said Hyacinthe; "but once he gave me a dinner of sausages and white wine, and once, in the summer, melons. If my eyes will stay open, I will finish this by morning, but indeed I am sleepy. Stay with me an hour or so, comrade, and talk to me of your wanderings, so that the time may pass more quickly."

"I will tell you of the country where I was a child," answered the stranger.

And while Hyacinthe worked, he told—of sunshine and

dust ; of the shadows of vine-leaves on the flat white walls of a house ; of rosy doves on the flat roof ; of the flowers that come in the spring, crimson and blue, and the white cyclamen in the shadow of the rocks ; of the olive, the myrtle and almond ; until Hyacinthe's slow fingers ceased working, and his sleepy eyes blinked wonderingly.

" See what you have done, comrade," he said at last ; " you have told of such pretty things that I have done no work for an hour. And now the cabinet will never be finished, and I shall be beaten."

" Let me help you," smiled the other ; " I also was bred a carpenter."

At first Hyacinthe would not, fearing to trust the sweet wood out of his own hands, but at length he allowed the stranger to fit in one of the little drawers, and so deftly was the work done, that Hyacinthe pounded his fists on the bench in admiration. " You have a pretty knack " he cried ; " it seemed as if you did but hold the drawer in your hands a moment, and hey ! ho ! it jumped into its place !"

" Let me fit in the other little drawers, while you go and rest a while," said the wanderer. So Hyacinthe curled up among the shavings, and the stranger fell to work upon the little cabinet of sandal-wood.

Here begins what the curé will have it is a dream within a dream. Sweetest of dreams was ever dreamed, if that is so. Sometimes I am forced to think with him, but again I see as clearly as with old Madame's eyes, that have not seen the earthly light for twenty years, and with her and Hyacinthe, I say " Credo."

Hyacinthe said that he lay among the shavings in the sweetness of the sandal-wood, and was very tired. He thought of the country where the stranger had been a boy ; of the flowers on the hills ; of the laughing leaves of aspen, and poplar ; of the golden flowering anise and the golden sun upon the dusty roads, until he was warm. All the time through these pictures, as through a painted veil, he was aware of that other boy with the quiet eyes, at work upon the cabinet, smoothing, fitting, polishing. " He does better work than I," thought Hyacinthe, but he was not jealous. And again he thought, " It is growing towards morning.

In a little while I will get up and help him." But he did not, for the dream of warmth and the smell of the sandal-wood held him in a sweet drowse. Also he said that he thought the stranger was singing as he worked, for there seemed to be a sense of some music in the shed, though he could not tell whether it came from the other boy's lips, or from the shabby old tools as he used them, or from the stars. "The stars are much paler," thought Hyacinthe, "and soon it will be morning, and the corners are not carved yet. I must get up and help this kind one in a little moment. Only I am so tired, and the music and the sweetness seem to wrap me and fold me close, so that I may not move."

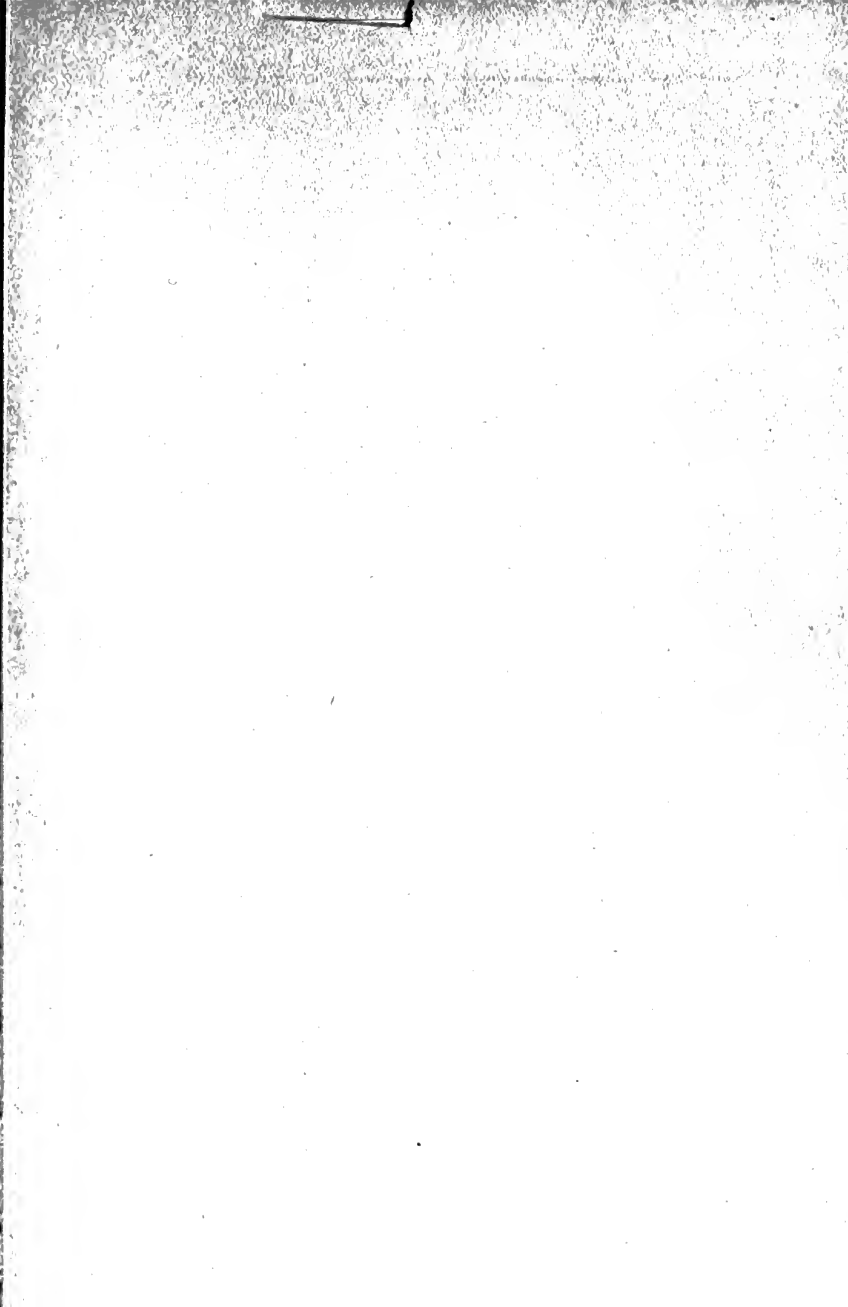
He lay without moving, and behind the forest there shone a pale glow of some indescribable colour that was neither green nor blue, while in Terminaison the church bells began to ring. "Day will soon be here!" thought Hyacinthe, immovable in that deep dream of his, "and with day will come Monsieur L'Oreillard and his stick. I must get up and help, for even yet the corners are not carved."

But he did not get up. Instead, he saw the stranger look at him again, smiling as if he loved him, and lay his brown finger lightly upon the four empty corners of the cabinet. And Hyacinthe saw the little squares of reddish wood ripple and heave and break, as little clouds when the wind goes through the sky. And out of them thrust forth little birds, and after them the lilies, for a moment living, but even while Hyacinthe looked, growing hard and reddish-brown and settling back into the sweet wood. Then the stranger smiled again, and laid all the tools neatly in order, and, opening the door quietly, went away into the woods.

Hyacinthe lay still among the shavings for a long time, and then he crept slowly to the door. The sun, not yet risen, sent his first beams upon the delicate mist of frost afloat beneath the trees, and so all the world was aflame with splendour and gold. Far away down the road a dim figure seemed to move amid the glory, but the glow and the splendour were such that Hyacinthe was blinded. His breath came sharply as the glow beat in great waves on the wretched shed; on the foam of shavings; on the cabinet with the little birds and the lilies carved at the corners.

He was too pure of heart to feel afraid. But, "Blessed be the Lord," whispered Hyacinthe, clasping his slow hands, "for He hath visited and redeemed His people, But who will believe?"

Then the sun of Christ's day rose gloriously, and the little sparrow came from his nest among the shavings and shook his wings to the light.





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